10¢

An African Novel by Robert

ARGOSY

JULY 27 WEEKLY

"The Winged Jinx"
an air mystery by
Eustace L. Adams

Stories by
Bedford-Jones—Mason
Dennis Lawton

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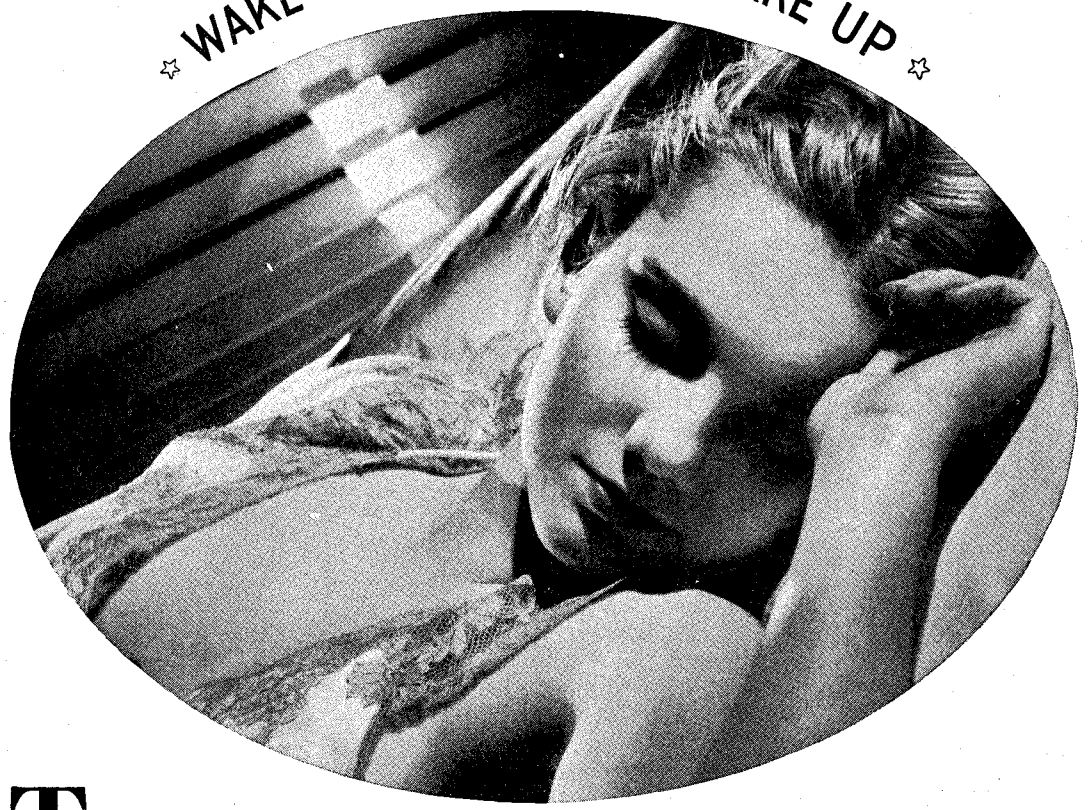
WAKE UP, LITTLE GIRL . . . WAKE UP



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A CANTER with that nice Princeton boy over the Westchester hills, green and misty . . . luncheon at the Ritz with Paul and Frank and Leila . . . to the matinee with Jud . . . then in Charlie's plane to New Haven and that wonderful party where your partner will be a real prince . . . What a lucky girl you are to be so popular! What's that you say . . . it's not all luck? A little forethought and common sense mixed in, you maintain . . . How right you are, little Miss Charming.

* * *

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ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

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The Winged Jinx

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

Author of "Anywhere but Here," "Alcatraz Bound," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A SLIVER OF STEEL.

EVERYTHING had been going fine until the engine exploded. She was a sweet ship to handle, this great new bomber, and I loved every strut and longeron in her. Now, after this test flight, I had been thinking that nobody would be able to say that she was a hoodoo, a flying jinx

Their firing was useless

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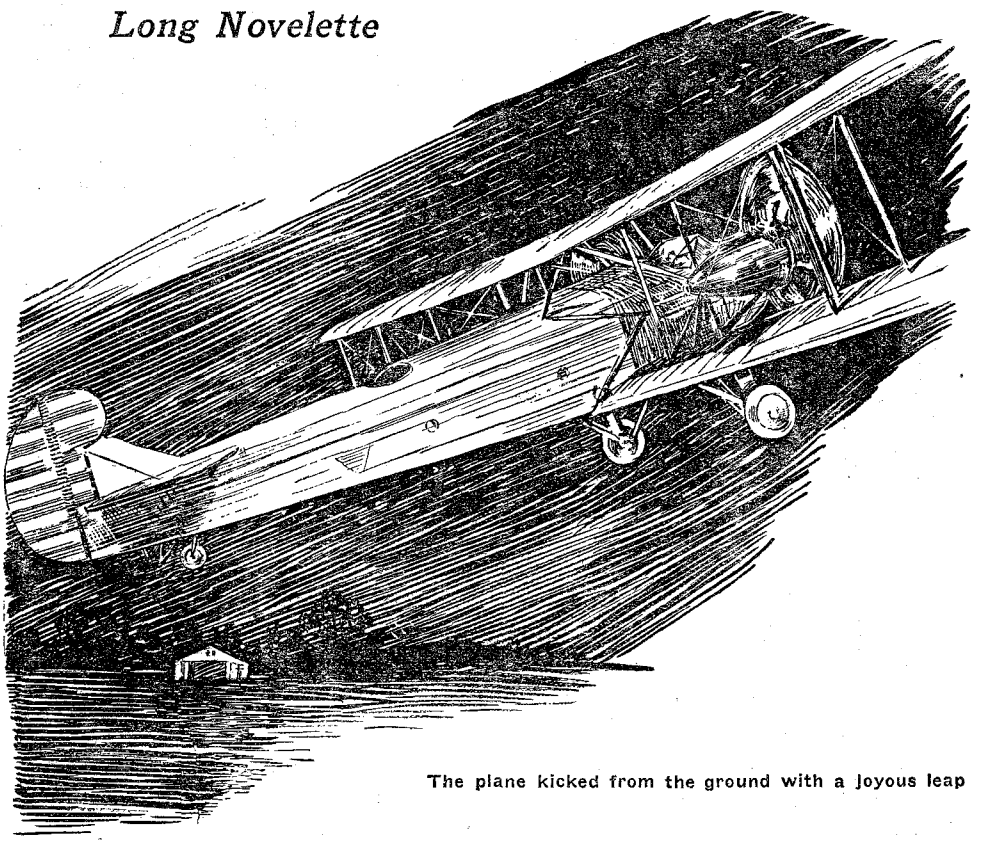
When test-pilot Hank saw a chance to prove that his pet bombing plane was not jinxed, he did not stop to count the risks

Long Novelette



The plane kicked from the ground with a joyous leap

that had already killed three men and would go on killing more.

Ray Graham, who had designed her, was sitting beside me in the pilot's cockpit. By the width of his grin I knew he was satisfied with his handiwork. Now he would be justified in the daring of his plans. And the swart-faced officers of the Costaranean army, who watched the tests from the ground, would know this ship to be the finest, fastest bomber ever to take the air. Also representatives of our own army and navy were gathered below to watch every maneuver as I put her through her paces.

Both Ray and I knew what this meant. It was entirely possible that the Apex Company might get the next contract from the United States army or navy, and then the goose would be hanging high for all of us—for the Apex Company; for Ray Graham, chief designer; and for me.

I thought, as I prepared to spin her down a few thousand feet, that she was too good for the Costaraneans, who had ordered her to help them smack down their truculent little neighbor, San Lorenzo. A squadron of these Apex bombers should be in every army area of the United States and—

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But it was at this exact moment that the propeller came off the boss on the left engine and went sailing ahead through the air. Before my hand could leap to the throttle to shut off the screaming engine, something broke inside and the whole motor simply disintegrated into a hundred jagged fragments.

I felt something hit me even before the noise of the exploding engine reached my ears. A wave of purest agony flashed through my left side and spread until I seemed to be floating in a sea of boiling oil. I felt myself going.

But I felt the ship swing, too, and something had to be done about that right away.

Mechanically, instinctively, I slapped the throttle of the right engine and shoved the wheel hard forward. Then, as the big ship nosed over, I began to fight a losing battle with my own consciousness.

There was no time to glide ten thousand feet. I would be gone long before we reached the ground. Ray could not help. He was an engineer, not a flyer, and none of the other pilots had exactly craved a ride in a ship they were convinced was jinxed. So I had to take her down myself. There was only one thing to do—to dive her. I would never last out an ordinary glide. Well, they wanted a crash dive, didn't they? I gave it to them. Nose straight down, tail straight up. Down we went until I was sure we would peel the wings.

And even as we plunged for the expanding earth, even as I watched things grow dim before my fading eyes, I had plenty of time to be sorry for Ray, whose pet plane this was. All his hopes had exploded with the engine.

It wasn't the ship's fault. Some damn fool had forgotten to slip a cotter key through the propeller boss. And it was the fault of the engine manufacturer, not of the Apex Company, that the motor had not stood up under the strain of several thousand revolutions. Now Costarano would not accept delivery. The United States army and navy officers would shrug and turn away. Our plans for developing an ocean-hopping transport out of her design were haywire. Everything was shot—everything—including me.

It would not be long now. The earth was expanding before my eyes, but everything was obscured by a gray veil which was getting thicker and thicker with every split-second. I could feel hot blood welling down inside my shirt and forming a pool of wet stickiness around my waist band. Every breath seemed to tear the living heart out of me. So I just held on, trying to keep myself together until it was time to pull out of that screaming dive.

I dreaded to pull back against the wheel. The pain was already almost unendurable. I hated to think how it would feel when I threw my weight on the controls. But I did want to save Ray—and the plane that I loved as a sailor loves a stout-hearted vessel. Jinx? Hell! She was a wonderful ship, but she hadn't had a chance!

I give you my word I remember nothing of that last thousand feet. I do remember dragging in a stabbing breath and beginning to haul on the wheel. But that is all. The pain faded in a blessed cloud of blackness that swung up with the pivoting earth. I know now, of course, that fifteen years of flying served me well. My muscles worked of their own accord, without conscious command from my brain.

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They tell me I made a pretty fair landing. But I was long past knowing.

SIX months at the outside, they gave me, those gut-and-gizzard specialists at the hospital. Six months if I was as lucky as my fellow flyers called me. But by the end of that time, if not before, that tiny sliver of steel from the exploding cylinder would bump into my heart, or something, and that would be the end. Curtains for Hank Roberts!

Well, that was all right, even if it was a strange feeling to get used to. I had packed a hell of a lot of things into the thirty-two years I had been fooling around. Might as well end everything by kicking out in bed with my shoes off as to scream down in a spinning ship or try to claw my way out of a blazing wash-out. I knew. I had been a mail pilot, a flyer in the banana wars of the hot countries, and, lastly and foolishly, a test pilot. So I knew exactly how it felt to crash.

And now I was through as a flyer. I hadn't a chance to pass the Bureau of Air Commerce examinations. The moment they saw that livid scar between the third and fourth ribs they would begin inquiring. And a three-minute peek through a fluoroscope would show them the little particle of steel which, presently, was going to get somewhere important. Or maybe they knew about it already, although I had sworn the surgeons to secrecy.

But the papers, being out of real news that day, had played the crash up in big style. "Hoodoo plane claims another victim!" they had said. "Captain Hank Roberts, famous test pilot, hero of desperate fight with jinxed ship!" And a lot more bunk that did not mean anything.

But even if I did manage to slip by the icy-eyed surgeons of the Department and got my ticket back, how could I fly when at any moment that tiny hunk of metal might hit the proper place and make me write out, immediately, a check for the full amount of my balance?

I could not go on testing the bomber and proving to the world that she was not jinxed, and add to her black record by dumping her through no fault of her own. I could not even fly solo, lest I pass out while flying over some city and sit down in the middle of Main Street.

Pretty sweet outlook for a guy who had no other trade but flying, eh?

Ray, his thin, sensitive face very glum, was allowed to visit me toward the end of the second week. The news he brought was bad. The Costaranean government, he told me, had declined to accept delivery of the big bomber, and had already purchased a couple of Comets—jobs that our own army and navy had turned down as being slow and unstable. Nor was that all. Nothing that the Apex crowd could say or do would make our army and navy inspectors come closer to the new ship than you could throw a freight train by the cow-catcher. They knew all about it, they said, and they weren't having any. Their pilots were getting knocked off quite fast enough, thank you, in crocks which weren't jinxed to start with. Our ship was very pretty, looked good on paper and on the ground, but they had seen quite enough and would not care for any more.

"Listen, Hank," Ray blurted, his sensitive lips twitching. "Hurry up and get well, will you? If you don't get out to the field pretty soon, it will be too late."

"Too late for what?" I said. "I'm just as glad the ship won't go to Cos-

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tarano. Those sweet-smelling dudes are the bullies of South and Central America, and they're out now to make a colony of San Lorenzo, which is one-eighth their size, and—"

"It isn't that, Hank," Ray said miserably. "Mr. Avery has backed the new bomber into the hangar, and I've got a hunch he's planning to dismantle it."

EVEN I, knowing I would never fly again, got sore at that. Except for Ray, who was about the only friend I had who had managed to keep on living, the bomber was just about all that I really cared about.

There was something about that great sleek ship that tugged at my heart-strings, and had done so ever since Ray inked in the first line of her on his drawing-board.

Queer how a man can feel for a thing as inanimate as a plane. No, it isn't, when you come to think about it. At a touch of his finger she ceases to become inanimate. What could be more alive than an airplane in flight? Certainly there is no more life to a boat than to a plane, is there? Yet from time immemorial men have loved their stout-hearted vessels, and nobody thinks it strange. And I had had a part in her from the very beginning. I had suggested the increased camber in her tapering hundred-foot wings. I had suggested other changes here and there, and I had watched every strut and longeron that went into her beautiful fuselage.

Naturally, I had expected to be the first to fly her. But just before her trial trip, something had gone wrong with one of our navy jobs, and I had flown out to San Diego to investigate. It was while I was on the coast that she had been walked out of her hangar for the first time. And things went wrong from the first moment she hit the sunlight. A mechanic, working on the wing, fell off, broke his silly neck on the concrete apron, and was dead before they got to him.

That was bad, but not as bad as what happened on her trial trip. A flipper wire snapped just as Joe Stevens was about to land her. She nosed down, smashed her bow and killed Joe, and the Bureau of Air Commerce inspector who was with him.

That made three the first day. I suppose it was no wonder that the boys shook their heads and damned her for being a jinx. Joe Stevens wasn't a bad guy, and they had to take it out on something, so they blamed it on the ship.

"Hank," Ray now said, "there's something mighty funny going on."

"Don't you hear me laughing myself to death?" I snarled.

"No, I mean it," he said earnestly. "It isn't natural for a ship to act like that. I believe it's sabotage."

"Phooie!" I snapped. "The field hadn't killed anybody for a long time; so it used up all its bad luck in a bunch. Take her up tomorrow and she'll walk through her paces like a milkman's horse."

"How long will it be before you can fly her again?" he asked eagerly.

I looked at him. "I'm not going to fly any more, Ray," I said slowly.

His mouth opened, but he didn't say anything. His eyes bugged out as he stared at me. And then, as if he were embarrassed, he turned his gaze away.

"Oh," he said after a while.

I knew what he was thinking. He thought the crash had bounced the nerve out of me. That happens, often. But it wasn't worth while explaining. It would take too long, and I didn't

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want to talk about it anyway. The first thing I knew I'd be feeling sorry for myself, and then there would be hell to pay.

"You're not going to fly any more," he asked after quite a long time, "ever?"

"Never," I said.

HE did not say anything much after that. He just fidgeted around in his chair and talked about the weather, and all, and pretty soon—but not quite soon enough—he left. Oh, he came back the next day, and the day after, and all the days after that while I was in the hospital, but it was hard to find things to talk about. I could see he thought talking about flying would bother me, but he wanted to make sure I understood he was my friend no matter what happened. He was that way, you see.

If they had convicted me of murder he'd go on thinking me innocent until Gabriel's trumpets blew reveille. But neither he nor I knew anything but flying, and it was a strain to have to talk about something else, so I was always a little glad when he shoved along.

The day before they discharged me from that school for plumbers I asked them to carve me open and pry out that hunk of steel, no matter where it happened to be hiding at the moment. Kill or cure, with the bill paid in advance and no questions asked. But X-rays and fluoroscopes had told them, they said, that it could not be done; and murder, even by surgeons, had ceased to be considered good, clean fun. So they turned me loose, hoping that I would not give the joint a bad name by passing out on the front steps.

Well, that was that. Ray was due at any moment, so I hurried away. I was feeling low, and did not want him feeling earnestly cheerful around me. So I went over to Times Square and tried to melt that sliver of steel with a full quart of strong whisky. And all the liquor did for me was to give me a crying jag over the fate of the new bomber, a ship that should be teaching the world what a plane should look, and fly, like, instead of eating her heart out in a dim, dusty hangar.

I tried to tell myself that it didn't matter to me any more. I was no longer a flyer. I was no longer much of anything except a guy who was due to check out any minute now, the sooner the better. Queer feeling, that. Queer to know that every drink you poured down the old hatch might be the last and that the floor would swing up at any minute and smack you on the chin for the count.

I knew I was drunk when I bought another quart and walked out of the joint. I knew it because I'm the most peaceable egg on two feet when I'm sober; but when I'm drunk I get the idea that the heavy-weight champ is a push-over for me. So when I offered to take on all the taxi drivers at the corner if one of them did not drive me out to Roosevelt Field in a hurry, I knew I had a load.

There were six of them, and I invited them to move in on me singly or in groups of all six. So I knew I was drunk. But it didn't make any difference. I wanted to see the new bomber right then, and I would have seen her if all the taxi cowboys in New York had ganged me.

Vaguely I remember tossing one of them into his own cab, climbing into the driver's seat and driving the thing ahead out of the mob. We were somewhere in Brooklyn before I let him talk me into changing places with him.

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He was getting too old, he said, to ride with any one who drove like I did. So I got in the back and promptly fell asleep. But when he waked me up at Roosevelt Field the drinks had died on me and I felt terrible.

CHAPTER II.

HOODOO PLANE.

IT wasn't the idea of dying, exactly, that bothered me. Long ago I had ceased to place much value upon the physical feats of inhaling and exhaling. And I knew that the world would manage to rock along for some years after the boys had patted me in the face with a shovel. The fact of the matter was that, of late, I had become a little lonely. I had pulled buddies out from under wrecks so many times that I was almost the last of the old gang left.

At thirty-two, believe it or not, I felt old. I knew that my gong would strike sooner or later. Better flyers than I had stripped their wings and made their last landings six feet under the ground. And, in a way, I was bracing myself for it every time I nosed a test job down at twenty thousand feet.

But this thing I was now up against —well, it was disconcertingly different, a matter wholly beyond my experience. At this very footstep, or the next, or one not more than six months from now, something would blow out my light. Something I couldn't get my two hands on and lick hell out of before it finally kicked the life out of me. There would be nothing I could do about it. That was what bothered me. Never before had I felt that matters were entirely out of my keeping, even that time when those natives down in the hot countries had me in the jug, waiting for the last sunrise to come up.

There were so many things I had wanted to do. Particularly about Ray and this wonderful ship of his which had gotten off to such a bad start. Now, suddenly, I knew why, in my cups, I had chartered a cab to come out to the field.

As a dog will pad hundreds of foot-sore miles to find the place it loves, so I, in my hour of darkness, had headed straight toward the plane which had come to mean more to me than I knew. Now, with me out of flying, she wouldn't have a chance. The other flyers didn't believe in her; I did, and with every fiber of my pilot's instinct.

I found myself stepping into the darkness as one of the night watchmen marched past with heavy tread. There were a few lights on the field; four or five hangars were working night shift. But most of the place was in gloom, as I had, without knowing why, wanted it to be.

I passed the long buildings of the Apex Company and came to a stop at the side door of the hangar in which the big bomber would be brooding upon her troubles.

I eased myself in through the side door. It was black as a pocket in that cavernous hangar, but I was conscious of the immense bulk of her, filling up all the space there was. I did not switch on the lights. I knew the way well enough.

Halfway across the floor I came to a sudden stop, sniffing suspiciously. The acrid scent of fresh-spilled gasoline came to my nostrils. But Ray had told me she wasn't to fly any more. Why, then, had they been gassing her up? Perhaps there was hope for her, after all. But somehow I could not

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make myself believe it. They had just been washing off her sides with gas, I told myself.

I walked straight through the darkness to the tremendous wheel, whose tires were the thickness of a man's waist. I clambered up the stirrups which led to her enclosed pilots' cockpit. I opened the door and sat down behind the controls, savoring the sweet smell of gas, and of dope, and of burned engine oil which had, for so many years, been a part of my life.

Just the two of us together there in the darkness, I thought. This huge, beautiful plane which had somehow had a hex put upon it, and I, who was just about reading the last chapter in the book. Yet we were bound up together in some odd manner, and I had a feeling that with me dead, this fine ship would never take wing again. So I just sat there, very quiet in the darkness, saying good-by to her, to all flying, to a big chunk of my life, and I have no idea how many seconds or minutes passed before I heard a small noise and felt hot, strong fingers close around my throat.

FROM somewhere in the blackness of the cabin behind me those throttling fingers had come, reaching out, slipping under my chin and clamping around my throat like steel hooks. Purple flashes snapped across my eyeballs as I squirmed around in the seat and tried to kick myself out from under. I reached up over my head with frantic hands and grabbed two fistfuls of crisp, curly hair. I tried to yank the man's scalp loose, but I couldn't get leverage.

I let go and jabbed viciously back with my thumbs, trying to gouge his eyeballs out of his head, but he ducked and my thumbs glanced harmlessly off his skull. Nothing I could do accomplished anything. All he had to do was just to hang on a few more seconds.

I slid down on my backbone, but his elbows, propped on the cushioned back of my chair, held me up like a hangman's rope. There was time for just one more effort. That was all. I had little strength left after so long in the hospital.

I reached down, fumbled wildly across the instrument board. Yes, it was there! My eager fingers closed around the welcome smoothness of the fire extinguisher. I yanked the heavy metal cylinder loose from its clips. I brought it upward and backward in one long, swinging arc. It struck hard and the fingers relaxed their deadly grip around my throat.

I dragged in a sobbing breath of air through my tortured windpipe and was out of my seat in an instant. The invisible enemy had fallen. He lurched to his hands and knees, plunged forward against my legs. Without the slightest compunction, I gave it to him. I hit him hard and was delighted to hear him flop down on the corrugated aluminum floorboards.

I reached for the cabin light and looked down at him. He was lying there, with blood streaming down from his dark hair. I turned him over with my foot.

And right then my heart almost stopped beating.

It was Ray!

I dropped to the floor and put my ear to his chest. I couldn't hear a thing except the spasmodic popping of my own heart. I felt of his wrist, but not the slightest pulse beat against my trembling forefinger. Dully, because I could think of nothing better to do, I pulled the first-aid kit loose from the bulkhead and bandaged his head tight-

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ly, trying to stem the turgid flow of crimson from just above the hair line. But it wasn't any use.

The bandage was instantly stained crimson.

I found myself wondering how long a man continued to bleed after he was dead. I had handled enough dead men, God knew, but I had never paid much attention to details like that.

Ray's head lolled around as if it were swiveled on a universal joint. His face was terrible in its waxy pallor. Suddenly full realization of what I had done swept over me. I guess I went a little nuts. Or maybe it was the liquor. I wouldn't know which. But I dropped to my knees beside that horribly limp figure.

"Listen, Ray," I said into those unhearing ears, "I didn't know it was you, see? Why didn't you say something, feller? Ray, don't be like that, will you? It's me, Hank! Don't you understand, damn you!"

He didn't say a word. I squatted on my heels beside him, looking down at him. He just lay there, without any color in his face except what came from under that bandage. Later, remembering, I realized that I saw the hinged door to the gunner's catwalk move slowly, then close again. But the impression never reached my numbed brain.

That I should have done this to my best friend, added to all the rest of the bad news I had heard that day—well, as I say, I guess my bell was slightly cracked at that moment. It just never occurred to me to hop out of the ship and go running from the hangar, yelling for someone to get a doctor.

If I thought at all, I thought that what was done was done and that was an end to it.

So there we were, the three of us whose fortunes were so inextricably, so tragically, bound up together: the great plane, a ship dishonored and unfit—so they said—to take the skies again; Ray Graham, whose reputation as a designer had been besmirched by this brain-child of his and who now lay struck down by the man he had trusted; I, who had at last used up all my luck, and all Ray's in the bargain. There we were, the three of us, in hell together!

THERE was just one added indignity I could think of that would now happen to us—to have this last catastrophe blazoned forth by the tabloids. Remembering the headlines after my crash, I could, in the eyes of my mind, see tomorrow's editions:

PILOT MURDERS DESIGNER IN HOODOO PLANE!

I decided then and there to spare Ray and our unhappy ship this final misfortune. I had no thought of escaping from the law. It was immaterial what happened to me, anyway. But I could not leave the ship to rust away in her hangar while pilots jerked their thumbs at her and said, "Remember, guy, how that old crate bumped 'em off?"

Scarcely knowing what I did, I picked Ray's slight figure up in my arms and propped it into the dual control seat. I strapped it securely in place with the wide-webbed safety belt. Then, obeying an impulse not yet clearly defined in my own mind, I dropped softly to the hangar floor and pulled the blocks from under the massive balloon tires.

Next I mounted the stepladder and

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carefully primed the two great engines. Then, as quietly as I could, I rolled the hangar doors open. Looking out, I could see the black figure of a night watchman making his rounds some hundred yards up the apron. I would have to work fast.

Back into the pilot's seat again. Inching the throttles forward, I flipped the switches and pulled the starter buttons. The engines kicked over, wheezed and choked. That on the left side backfired, then caught with a satisfying roar.

The right one was slower. I thought she would never start. Under the thrust of the left propeller the bomber began to move lurchingly ahead. She rolled down the concrete apron, bumbled across the tarmac and began to gather speed. Then the right motor spat flame and began to purr with eager life.

Things were happening on the ground. A watchman ran alongside, shouting through the racket and dragging at his gun. A floodlight snapped on, washing the field with its eerie incandescence. The black silhouettes of men appeared at suddenly lighted hangar doors. Three bullets cracked through the safety glass of the windscreen. The hell with them! Nothing—not even machine guns—could stop us, Ray and the bomber and I, from getting into the cool, clean air where we could check out decently together.

The controls hardened. The tail came up. The plane kicked the ground from under with a joyous leap. The damn fools, who had said she didn't have the spirit of flight in her! We understood one another, this grand ship and I.

She had just been waiting for me to come back to her so she might show me what she could really do. Or did she know that the body of Ray Graham, her designer, the man who had given her wings and a soul, was aboard, and she wanted to tell him that he had imagined better than he knew? Every pulse beat of her sturdy engines flowed through steel and wire to my wrists in a reassuring message of unleashed power.

I patted the wheel with my hand. Together we would fly, together we would go out, all three of us, in a swift, all-obliterating crash. That was the way it was written in the book.

NEW YORK, a billion glittering diamonds on black velvet, unrolled below the right wing tip. Long Island, shameless in her spangled bedizenry, smirked darkly under us as we headed for the limitless stretch of blackness that was the Atlantic Ocean. That would be the place to get it over with. No gawking crowds to gaze at the mess which had once been a plane and two men. The sea would wipe out everything in its clean wet embrace.

I had forgotten to look at the gas gauges in the mechanic's compartment behind me. But that did not matter. She could flop as soon as she reached the beach, or a dozen hours later, just as she chose.

I loved the sweet response of her sensitive controls, loved the smooth cleavage of her slim hull through the bumpy night; she could fly on and on forever and it would be all right with me, and with Ray, too, who was past caring when and what happened to him.

The shore line slid beneath our wheels. An ocean liner, appearing small in that infinity of black sea, passed far beneath us, heading toward Ambrose Channel. The shore lights faded, and presently blinked out to

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nothing, and we were blessedly alone, Ray and I and our ship. Or so I thought, until the girl appeared in the cockpit just behind me.

Her hand, reaching out of the darkness, touched my shoulder. Startled, I jerked at the controls and the plane leaped like a bucking broncho. I swung around in my seat and peered up at her in the reflected lights from the instrument board. Then I was sure I had gone screwy. She was small and slim, and very beautiful, a vignette in black and white shadows which seemed in that instant of entire disbelief as unreal as any dream.

I reached up and touched her to see if she could possibly be of human flesh and blood. She was, all right. She slapped my hand away with a quick downward swing of her left arm, and then I noticed what she held in her right hand.

It was a gun that looked as large as a cannon.

Bitterness scorched my soul like a blanket of acid. Just when everything was fine she would have to appear out of nowhere and spoil it all. So now what? I would have to turn back, find some isolated landing field and get rid of her.

And that would be just the time for the big ship to run out of gas. Or, as a matter of fact, why should I turn back? I had not invited her to stow away. She had joined our little party of her own free will, so why not just let her come along to hell with the rest of us?

She was staring at Ray now, and the color had drained out of her smooth young cheeks. With an effort she dragged her eyes away from his limp figure. She pushed her cannon straight at my head. That did not bother me. What could a gun do that time would not accomplish of itself in a few more minutes or hours? I cut the engines down so I could hear what she was trying to say.

"Turn south!" she commanded.

INSTANTLY I understood the reason for her wide dark eyes and her inky black hair. She was a Latin. Not one of the café girls, or the smiling paraders you see of an evening in the plazas, but an aristocrat—I knew, having spent four hectic years down there, trying to teach young Latins to fly and to fight with something else than their finger nails.

"Turn south!" she commanded again, and her gun jammed hard against my head.

"Shoot, and be damned to you!" I snarled at her. "And then what?"

"And then," she said evenly, "I would fly the plane myself. Turn south, I tol'—told you."

And now I knew who she was, which explained much—but not everything. I had seen her pictures in the papers. Yolanda Garcia, she was the first San Lorenzan girl ever to be granted a transport license. I had never seen her before—she had learned to fly out on the coast—but I remembered her pictures and how she had tried to break the transcontinental record a couple of times without succeeding. Just another girl flyer!

Her finger trembled on the trigger. The straight dark line of her eyes was purposeful. I knew that death was very close, but I did not care.

"I was going to steal this plane," she said, her softly accented voice cutting through the steady drone of the motors. "Now you have done it for me, Captain Roberts. I knew you were —were hard-boiled, but I didn't know you were a thief and a murderer."

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"You know it now," I told her, grimly.

It did not surprise me that she knew who I was. The newspaper men had always liked me and considered me, they said, good copy. Besides, I had flown in and out of nearly every field in the country, and had a lot of friends.

"Are you going to turn south?" she repeated.

"Sure," I agreed. "One direction is as good as another. Aren't we nice and cozy, flying like this together?"

She glanced at Ray, and winced. And then, suddenly, she started, and the gun almost fell out of her hands. I followed the line of her staring eyes. The plane slipped off on one wing as I jerked unconsciously at the wheel. Ray's body was slowly straightening up and his dull eyes were wide open!

CHAPTER III.

OFF TO SAN LORENZO.

"TAKE this wheel, baby!" I snapped to the girl. I was out of my seat even before the words reached her amazed ears. I leaped over to Ray's side, thumbed the safety belt and lifted him into my arms. Carrying him back to the catwalk leading to the gunner's cockpit, I lowered him carefully to the floor and put my jacket under his head. My throat was so tight and dry I couldn't speak. His open eyes gazed unfocused into my face. Slowly I could see recognition coming back to them. His white face cracked into a rueful grin.

"Was—was it you I tried to throttle, Hank?" he murmured.

"I thought you were dead!" I gasped. "I thought I had killed you!"

"And I thought you were the bird who was trying to ruin the plane!" he said. "Phew, what a head! I was tipped off that somebody would be at the plane tonight, so I hid and—" For the first time, he seemed to realize where we were. "How come we're flying?" he demanded, trying to sit up. "Is this a test?"

"You lie down and try to rest for a few minutes," I said soothingly. "Then, when you feel stronger, I'll tell you."

I remembered I still had most of a quart of liquor in my pocket. I gave him a drink and then killed the rest myself. I needed it. But he would not lie down. He pushed my hands away, tottered to his feet and stumbled into the cockpit. When he saw Yolanda Garcia calmly sitting at the controls, I thought he would fall over. He looked through the windscreen and saw nothing but blackness on every side.

"Will you kindly tell me—" he began, settling into the co-pilot's seat.

So then, while the girl listened, I told him everything—or almost. I didn't want any sob stuff about the doctors' verdict, so I did not mention that. "—And then," I was concluding, "this doll had to crash the party. So what now?"

"I'll tell you what," she said, taking her compelling eyes up from the compass. "We're flying to San Lorenzo."

"And then to the North Pole to kiss Santy Claus," I said gravely.

"No, I mean it," she said. "I was going to do it myself if you—"

"You?" I scoffed. "Listen, baby, you may be everything there is in the way of flying, but just try flying a ship like this some three thousand two hundred miles!"

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"Be quiet, please!" she said, her scornful gaze striking at me. "One can do what one has to. My country has been attacked by Costarano, who wishes to make a province of her. We have not the money to buy such ships as these. Costarano has. Therefore I—"

I did not realize my hand had moved. But suddenly my fingers were pressing into her soft young windpipe. I was seeing her through a bright red haze of fury.

"Did you jimmy up this ship on the tests?" I snarled. "Did you pull out the cotter key on that propeller boss, you little—"

"Hank!" Ray yelled.

He threw himself out of his seat and slammed his body against me. That, I am sure, plus the sudden lurching of the ship, saved Yolanda Garcia's life in that moment of frantic anger. I took a long breath, reached down over her slumping shoulder and pulled the ship out of her precipitous dive. I yanked Yolanda out of her chair and spun her back into the corner. I sat down behind the wheel and grimly worked the plane back on her course.

Ray, the sap, steadied the girl and acted as if it mattered whether she was hurt or not. He had his arm around her, holding her up, and he looked as if he were ready to go into a mammy song. Did he realize that this fool girl was the reason we were up here, he with his reputation ruined and his head cracked, and I all set to kick out at any moment?

FOR lack of anything better to do, I swung around on a general course that would hit the United States somewhere between New York and Delaware Bay. God knows I did not want to head back. What would we do when we got there? Personally I thought it would be just as well if the gas gave out and we sat down right where we were.

What had Ray and the girl to live for? What did any one have to live for? It might save them both a hell of a lot of trouble if they got it now, cool and clean and easily. For two bits I'd have nosed down right then and there. That's how low I felt.

"Listen, *señor capitan,*" she said, behind me. "I did all zose—those things to this ship for my country."

"Bolony!" I snarled. "You did it because you were a woman and just couldn't keep out of trouble."

"Please! I could not let Costarano have this plane. With it they could bomb Puerto Lucia and make of all San Lorenzo a province. There was no reason for them to attack my little country, but they want our oil and our coffee lands and—"

"What you hear is me crying," I snapped. "Pass me the weeping rag!"

But I could not stop her. In her earnestness she bent down close to my face, and I could smell the sweet fragrance of her glossy hair. It reminded me, somehow, of hot white moons, and of great purple mountains that march down to a blue sea.

"Captain Roberts," she begged, "I paid a mechanic five hon—hundred dollars yesterday to fill all these gas tanks. That, in this long-range bomber, is enough for four thousand miles. It is only thirty-two h u n d r e d to my country."

"So what?" I sneered.

"I hid in the tail last night, hoping I could find a way to steal this ship. With her the San Lorenzan Air Force could bomb El Centro, the capital of Costarano, just as they plan to bomb

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Puerto Lucia with the Comets they bought instead of this Apex. We can win the war. Then, with the indemnity, we can pay the Apex Company for the ship and—"

"And bail us out of Alcatraz?"

But, just the same, what she had said was causing a string of fireworks to explode in my brain. Oh, I did not forget that by her sabotage she had made that propeller fly off, had made the engine explode and condemn me to death. No, I still hated her with a cold hatred that would have appalled her had she known, but—

"Ray," I said, "listen, you old pencil-pusher. How would you like to give another demonstration to the Costaraneans who gave this ship the old razoo? Let's fly down there and give it to them and make them wish they had gone to hell with their backs broke before they switched to Comets!"

From the expression on his scholarly face I judged he was thinking that I had lost my mind. But I was warming up to my subject.

"We fly back to Roosevelt Field now," I continued, gradually swinging the bow of the plane toward the southward, "and what happens? The ship gets dismantled, there's publicity in the newspapers, and I begin to break rocks for the next several years."

"Not when I tell them—"

"That this girl did the sabotage?" I cut in. "Remember, she did things that caused the death of two men. For that she'll do some high, wide and fancy squirming when they shoot the old alternating current through the seat cushions. Look, this San Lorenzo is a swell little country—for the tropics. It is only the size of a pickaninny's left ear, but it packs a punch like a Black Widow's sting. That's the only reason some big country hasn't gobbled it up long ago. Now Costarano, whose men slick their hair down and wear perfume, has decided to annex it. And don't forget—they turned this ship down and bought Comets to help them do it."

"You ought to be in a padded cell!" he gasped.

"And listen; we show the world this ship can hop thirty-two hundred miles, which draws the interest of our own army and navy and of the transport operators. We knock hell out of those Comets, and that shows our Services what might happen to all those Comet bombers they are using. And we end up by selling this ship to the San Lorenzans and taking the jack home to mamma. Howzat?"

"YOU'RE crazier than I thought!" he roared, pressing his hands to his bloody bandage. "This isn't our ship to take, we haven't even a license, and—"

You would have known that he was an engineer, accustomed to the kind of schemes he could figure out on his slide rule and draw with India ink. Never, since I had known him, which covered a period of ten years, had he broken a law more serious than a traffic ordinance.

But—and this is the point—in the evenings, at home, he read newspaper and magazine stories about guys who drank deep of the heady wine called adventure, and he got a tremendous thump out of them. But offer him a chance to go helling off across the horizon on a blind, crazy hunch, and what would he say? Just this: "It's a fool idea, and I'll have nothing to do with it."

He was right, of course. I *was* a fool, or I'd have been anything in the world but a test pilot. But here was

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just one factor he could not know. Punishment for what I was about to do would mean nothing to me. How could they punish a guy who was already sentenced to die? Here was my one chance to fly again, to fill the short span of life which remained to me with the ultimate in raw, sweet danger. To pack thrills enough for a dozen years into half that number of days or weeks —that was the idea.

Give me a few hours careening through the skies with the power of twelve hundred horses, squinting down through a ring-sight, and then I'd be ready for Old Man Percentage to tap me on the shoulder.

But I suddenly realized that Ray had his life to live out. No Damoclean sword hung suspended over his head. His life was just beginning, instead of ending.

"Listen, big boy," I said, more quietly, "you're right. This isn't a job for you. I'm going to swing in across the eastern shore of Maryland and see if I can find a place where I can land without being seen. You can tell the world I shanghaied you."

He just looked at me. "And are you going on down there?"

"Certainly."

He took a long breath. "Well, somebody," he said, gloomily, "has got to go with you to keep you out of trouble, so I guess I'm elected. Go on, now, and steer. I feel like hell. I want to go to sleep."

IT was touch and go all the way down to keep ourselves from being reported. We got the radio started and the air was full of frantic messages about us. It was noon the next day before the Apex people discovered that Ray had disappeared, and for a while they put the blame on him. Then some bright newspaper man discovered that I was gone, too, and an hour later the police found the taxi driver who had taken me out to Roosevelt Field. So that was the story they were stuck with. Ray and I, for some purpose best known to ourselves, had stolen the plane.

The mechanic who had filled the tanks for Yolanda did not confess, so it never occurred to the authorities that we might be winging our way calmly along the islands of the Lesser Antilles at the very moment they were searching airports within a five-hundred-mile radius, which was the most we could have done with the gas they thought to be in the tanks.

We had two narrow escapes. We came down out of a violent tropic squall late in the afternoon to see a fruit steamer just under us, and the way we popped back into the thunder clouds was a caution. For the next ten minutes we tuned the radio all over the dial, trying to see if she had reported us by wireless. Then, half an hour later, one of the four-motored Pan-American Clippers almost blundered upon us. Having seen her, we were afraid she had spotted us, too, but when we tuned in on her wavelength and listened anxiously to her methodical position reports, she said nothing about us.

It seems strange now, as I sit back and remember that long, easy flight that was the prelude to so much hell to follow. It is hard to understand now why I did not notice what was happening to Ray. God knows I should have been able to recognize every emotion on his thin, mobile face. He and I had roomed together, on and off, for years. Whenever I came back from some far country I would move in with him quite as a matter of course.

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We were friends as only two men who are essentially different in character can be. I was a flyer, loving a fight or a frolic, heedless and restless; he an engineer, patient, calm, and entirely willing that my escapades should furnish him, vicariously, with all the excitement he needed outside the realm of fiction.

Together we complimented one another and made a combination, as chief designer and chief test pilot, that could —before this new bomber trouble— have found a home in any factory in the United States.

But, dumb cluck that I was, I thought the expression on his face was just gratitude for the way Yolanda fussed over his bandages and got him water to drink when his aching head caused his fever to mount. Oh, well, it doesn't matter now. You take the breaks as they come, and try to laugh when they are bad, and you kid yourself that next time everything will be all right.

And the funny part of it is, you actually believe it. So what the hell?

CHAPTER IV.

WHITEY SHATTUCK.

PUERTO LUCIA was not as I had remembered it. Most of the street lights were turned off, and the red-coated band was not playing in the dusty plaza, and the streets were more crowded than usual with dull-eyed, barefooted soldiers and arrogant, swaggering officers. The Costaranean army, the waiter said, was just on the other side of the range of mountains which surrounded the city, and it was rumored that a break-through was expected at any moment.

At that, it was good to be back. There is something about the hot countries that gets into your blood like malaria germs, and somehow you never quite get over it. Many a night in the past four years I had snapped out of my sleep, thinking I smelled the dusty, acrid scent of the tropics, and that I had heard the murmurous sound of the crowds as they paraded around the plaza at night, and that I was once again with the gang at the Café d'Or. But none of these things were true; the n o i s e was from the apartment downstairs, the smells were just those of New York on a hot evening, and the gang—well, all the good ones were dead.

Yes, it was good to be back, even with the pall of gloom which hung over the town like a sea fog. I, knowing the place, was acutely conscious of it, but Ray was not. He had never been in the tropics before, and he thought everything was just swell. I was astonished. I had not expected him to like it. God knows he had made enough fuss coming down—except when he was looking at Yolanda.

Now he could hardly wait for her to join us. She had left us at the landing field, a scrubby, weed-grown place which had been abandoned by the *Companie des Avions* when the French and German transport operators hooked up together like the proverbial lion and the lamb. Yolanda, as soon as we sighted the first of the outlying islands, had radioed ahead to some friends of hers.

It appeared that they had expected her to steal the plane, and had made all arrangements for her landing in secrecy. Half a dozen cars were there, throwing the beams of their searchlights across the weedy tarmac. They greeted us like conquering h e r o e s, especially Yolanda, but I had to tramp

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hard on Ray's toes when a tall, slick-haired Latin went into a two-minute clinch with her as soon as her small feet hit the ground.

"Who the hell is that?" Ray asked me, truculently, while I was dodging a couple of officers who were trying to give me the hot and moist. I don't like to be kissed by any one in pants. "Who," he repeated, "was that guy who acted like—"

"Oh, pipe down," I said. "Ask him yourself." And then, very politely, to a colonel, "*Muchas gracias,* my colonel. Do not thank me. The idea was that of Señorita Garcia."

They had taken her away in a big Spanish car. They had offered to take us, too, but my side was hurting and I needed a shave. Rather ungraciously I had refused, and, in spite of Ray's yearning looks, had told Yolanda that when she felt like it she could reach us at the hotel.

The officers left two San Lorenzan mechanics, Luis and Carlos, and after I had given the ship an inspection from bow to rudder, I told them to guard it with their lives, and accepted the invitation of one of the lieutenants to ride to the hotel with him. Ray was peckish all the way in, and for two bits I would have popped him on the nose.

Each of us had had three or four drinks, when I saw a familiar figure come strolling along the sidewalk, pausing to glance carefully into every face as he passed. I recognized him with a sinking of the heart. But there was no use turning my back to him. Whitey Shattuck always saw exactly what he looked at, and there were a number of reasons why he would not have forgotten me.

"Looking for somebody, Whitey?" I asked, as he drew closer.

With perfect lack of self-consciousness, his right hand leaped toward his necktie. As a man instinctively reaches for his hat upon meeting a woman he knows, so Whitey's hand always darted for his armpit holster when an unexpected voice spoke his name. And well it might, too. Offhand I could probably count thirty people who would have put a gat to the back of his head if they dared.

"Oh, it's you, Hank?" he said, and his hand came away from his necktie. "I heard you were in town, and I was looking for you."

"This is Ray Graham, Whitey. Ray, meet Whitey Shattuck." And then, because the drinks were having a bigger uplift than I had expected, "Whitey is a salesman, Ray. He sells almost anything that kills people. A good salesman, too. Never lets sentiment interfere with business. If his mother set out to kill his father, Whitey would sell her the knife, for cash in advance."

WHITEY'S pale eyes rested briefly upon me, and I was conscious of a tiny chill running up and down my backbone. He looked, in the flat intentness of his gaze, as if he had two glass eyes. But he didn't. His eyes were very good, which is why he continued to live while honest men were busily shoving daisies into the daylight.

Now he sighed. "Hank, you always were a hog for trouble. Why do you try to rile me?"

I poured another tumberful of native rum and shoved the bottle toward him. Not that I wanted to buy him a drink. I wanted to get the bottle away from Ray. He was not used to it—not used to any hard liquor, in fact, and he could not have imag-

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ined how this stuff could set its teeth in.

"Whitey," I said tiredly, "I'm sorry you are in San Lorenzo. Everywhere you go you leave your mark."

"How come," he asked bluntly, "you are cutting in on my racket? I was expecting to sell these people some Savoia-Marchettis, and now you bring down that Apex bomber! I don't regard it as friendly."

I looked at him. Those pale, inhumanly staring eyes hit me like a physical blow. His thin, bloodless lips were smiling, but there was a twitching at the left corner that belied the smile and made it a grimace.

"I've only been here two hours," I said. "How did you know I brought a bomber down?"

"I make my money and keep on living by knowing things," he said succinctly. "Listen, and listen carefully. Cutting in on me isn't the important thing this time, so long as you don't do it again. You'll learn why when I tell you. This war is cooked, see? At midnight tonight the Costaraneans will break through at South Pass, and they will be ringing doorbells in town here in the morning. And I'll be on the roof of this hotel blowing kisses down at them b e c a u s e they owe me heavy money.

"I got a slice of the commission off that sale of the Comets, instead of the Apex, to the Costaraneans, and I sold them a job lot of Vickers guns that is a nice bit of hard money. But I want to collect, see, and I wouldn't care about anything going wrong and making it hard for the Costaraneans to win."

I moved the bottle a little farther away from Ray. Didn't the fool know the stuff was loaded?

"Look, Hank," Whitey went on, his fingers—his killer's fingers—toying with a burned match. "I hear that big bomber is jinxed. But after you swiped her, she didn't act like it, if you got away when the cables said you did. If you were to use her down here, you might do two things; you might make it hard for the Costaraneans to get through that pass, and you might make them wonder why I didn't sell them Apexes instead of cabling them to buy Comets."

"Oh, you did that, did you?" I said.

"Yeah, and I came near putting it over, too. I hear G e n e r a l Garcia's good-looking daughter Yolanda was a help to me, even if neither of us knew it at the time."

"Why, you—" Ray exploded.

Then he jumped, violently, as my boot came in harsh contact with his shin.

He glared at me and lapsed into sulky silence.

"What," Whitey asked, softly, "were you going to say?"

I AM fairly tough, and so known in the flying fraternity. But I had no gun, and it was never considered bright to t a n g l e with Whitey Shattuck unless you had a gun all drawn and pointed. And even if you did that, you would not be considered a good insurance risk for the future. I had no special desire to die before my brief time was up.

"Forget it, Whitey," I said. "He's a tenderfoot down here. But if you got rough, I'd have to help him out."

I had my feet under my chair, ready to go into action. Whitey did not even look at Ray, who was pouring himself another drink. Whitey was observing me intently. Then he turned his pale eyes back to the table, and I relaxed.

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"Well, it comes to this," he said, after a while; "I'd like to get you out of the way for a few days. And that big bomber, too. It would be worth, say, five thousand gold if you were to fly up to Mexico and take the cure for ten days."

"No can do, Whitey," I said. "It just so happens that you have hit me in a weak place. I don't especially need money, and I am fond of that plane and anxious to see what it will do under war conditions."

His eyes narrowed just the least bit. That, I remembered, was a danger signal. I picked up the match holder. It was a heavy thing of cast brass. I began to fool with it, waiting.

"It's too bad," Whitey said. "That means I got to wire the police up in New York that you are here. I hate to do that. It seems kind of like stool-pigeoning. But it's better than killing you, or paying some peons five dollars to do it. The funny thing is, I kind of like you."

"What would it get you to wire the police?" I asked.

"Within an hour you'd be arrested and held for extradition."

"Even if the government thought I might help lick the Costaraneans?"

"Baby," he said with such earnestness I could not help but believe him, "it would just play into my hands. If the government refused to arrest you, Uncle Sam would slap an embargo on that would—"

"Do you know, Mr. Whitey Shattuck, what you are?" asked Ray suddenly, leaning across the table. His thin, scholarly face was pale, but his blue eyes had darkened until they were almost black. His lips were smiling with a queer sort of smile that I had never seen before. The man was tight as a tick, and his character had changed in front of my eyes. He was actually spoiling for a fight. "You are," he continued, deliberately, "a double-crossing rat and a—"

No use trying to stop it now. It was too late. So I could only act quickly and hope for the best.

I SURGED forward, heaving the whole table into Whitey's lap before that upswinging hand of his disappeared within his white pongee coat. As he toppled over backward, I saw that gun come up. I still had the match holder. I pulled my hand back to give it to him, but Ray's plunging figure got in my way. Ray was diving in at him as an end goes after a circling halfback. His hands went around Whitey's throat. The two of them kicked around under the table, under chairs. The whole place was instantly in an uproar. Men shouted and women screamed hysterically. But I did not even hear. I was pushing chairs and tables aside, trying to reach those two who were scrambling around like two cats in a bag.

My heart was in my throat and was choking me. It could only end one way if I didn't prevent that end.

A couple was slow about getting out of my way. I bunted the man clear across the sidewalk. At every instant I expected to hear a shot. There they were. Ray was on top. He was astride Whitey like a drunken jockey. Both his hands were around Whitey's throat. And Whitey, his face purpling, was not even trying to break that grip. I saw him pulling at something that was under his squirming body. Just before I reached them he got it out. I saw the blue-black streak of a gun arc up and jam itself into Ray's side.

My own right foot flew out with

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the speed of desperation. I kicked Whitey full in the face. It was the only thing to do. The gun dropped harmlessly to the sidewalk. Whitey went limp.

I grabbed Ray by the coat collar and yanked him so hard it nearly broke his neck. I pulled him to his feet and spun him around to face the hotel door.

"You damn fool!" I panted. "Now you've done it!"

"Let me go!" he snarled in a voice that was new to me. "Boy, I'm just getting steamed up!"

"Go on," I said. "Go on before I pop you one!"

For a minute I thought he would hit me. If he had I'd have cooled him off. I was getting pretty sore myself, knowing, as I did, that the only way now to be safe would be to shoot Whitey Shattuck where he lay. I gave Ray a push. Reluctantly he began to walk toward the door.

The patrons were churning around excitedly. The manager was pushing his way through the crowd. Whitey lay there on the floor, a huge purple welt rising on his cheek bone. I knew it would save a lot of trouble if I got his other gun—I could see the handle of it under his lapel—and gave him the works then and there. What did I have to lose? I would be dead pretty soon anyway. And it might be the saving of Ray's life.

I got the gun. I needed it. But I did not kill him. Oh, I realized that I was being silly, but I had never yet killed an unconscious man, and I wasn't starting now. Had he rolled to his feet—even unarmed as he now was—I should have emptied the clip into him without the slightest compunction; but he did not. He just lay there, breathing stertorously. I turned to the manager. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out a handful of American bills and gave them to him.

"Pardon, *señor*," I said politely. "The *caballero* is quite drunk. He fell, yes?"

He glanced at the notes in his hand. "Thanks a million," he said. "With your permission, we will put him to bed."

"You have my permission," I said, "to give him a large dose of Paris green."

CHAPTER V.

PRESSING THE TRIGGER.

RAY was sitting on the bed when I boiled in. He was looking very pleased with himself.

"You know," he said cheerfully, "I think I'm going to like this country."

"You won't live long enough to get to like it!" I snapped at him. "Of all the guys in the world to tangle with, that was the worst. Do you know he's considered the most dangerous man in the tropics? He's the one man I know who hasn't one drop of warm blood in his veins. And you have to—"

"He fell as easy as any other man," Ray informed me, beaming happily.

"Shut up, now, and let me think!" I snarled. "He said something important. What time is it?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"He said the war was cooked. That is important. And he said the San Lorenzan lines at the South Pass would break at midnight, and that the Costaraneans would be here in Puerto Lucia by daybreak. I wish Yolanda were here."

"Let's go find her," he suggested.

"The old master mind!" I snarled. "I would have thought of that my-

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self, in an hour or two." There was a rap on the door. I whirled, Whitey's gun ready. But it was the boy with another bottle of liquor. "We didn't order that!"

"Oh, yes, we did," Ray said. "I did. I thought you might need it. Did you bring two glasses?"

"*Si, patron,*" said the boy, leaving the liquor and the set-ups.

"Let it alone!" I said. "You're tight now. If you have another drink you'll be— Where," I said, eying his bulging hip pocket, "did you get that gun?"

"I picked it up off the floor when you gave Whitey the boot," he said, proudly. "Seemed like a good idea."

"Well, let's be going," I said. "I'd sort of like to get out of here before you tear something. Come on. Let's find Yolanda's house."

Having a strong liking for my own skin, I took him down the back stairway. It was about time for Whitey to be waking up, and it would not be long after that before Whitey would be looking for his guns. He would know exactly where, and how, to look for them.

I was glad when we got out into the street. It was cool and clean outside, and trouble seemed a million miles away.

I hailed a cruising cab.

"You know where General Garcia lives?" I asked.

He did, of a certainty, and I prodded Ray into the back. We drove down a wide, palm-lined boulevard, past the statue of "The Liberator," and turned up a narrow side street whose name I did not know.

Ray chuckled. "You know," he said contentedly, "this is the sort of thing I've always read about. I never thought I'd be all mixed up in—"

"I wish you were back in New York," I said testily. "First thing I know I'll be sending you back on ice."

But he was not to be stopped. "All my life I've read stories about lovely *señoritas,* and battles in the tropics, and revolutions, and—"

"—and they sounded swell, but you never thought you'd be in one," I finished sourly. "I know. I've seen mugs come and go in my time. They come like you do, with the bit in their teeth and their tails over the dashboard. And a while later their friends take up collections to send them home. I got back home, and damn lucky I was, too. Why I ever got the dizzy idea of coming back, I don't know. Nuts, that's what I was, just nuts!"

He chuckled indulgently, not believing a word of it. Funny, how you can never tell what a guy will do when he is tight, unless you have seen him that way before. And I was sure in my own mind that Ray had never been tight before in his life. Suddenly, sitting there beside him, a feeling of utter depression settled on me.

He had not wanted to come down here, but I had talked him into it. I had taken him by the nape of the neck and shaken him out of the ordered routine of his life. Had I let him alone, had I not plunged him into a maelstrom of unfamiliar sights and sounds and violence, he would have worked himself out of the mess back there at the factory, and everything would have been all right.

BACK there at the factory? Had there ever been a factory? It seemed like a dream, those last four years while I had been testing planes. Now thinking about it, I realized exactly why I had taken that job as a test pilot when so many others

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had been offered me upon my return to the States.

My nerves had been drugged by excitement, by violence, while I had been soldiering in the tropics; they no longer reacted except under the tonic of raw danger. I would have died of boredom tooling big transports from one place to another, and back again. The nearest thing to a kick I could find—without quite realizing what I was hunting for—was the quick stab of excitement when you nosed a plane down in a power dive from twenty thousand feet.

Would the wings peel off? Would she fall to pieces? Would she pull out at the end of that giddy plunge? So long as I could do that, could feel the prickling of my scalp at the moment of supreme danger, then I no longer craved adventure in far countries. That was what the tropics had done for me.

And now I had brought Ray, who was not an adventurer but an engineer, down here and had inoculated him with the same virus. Would he ever again be able to bend placidly, patiently, over a drawing board, designing planes in which other men would fight, and fly, and careen joyously across this horizon, and the next, and all the horizons after that?

The cab drew up with a flourish behind two motor cars which were parked before a large, quiet house. The driver announced that this was the home of General Garcia. I looked at the house. Like most others in Latin cities, it looked, from the street, more like a warehouse than a dwelling. I guessed that somewhere within those quiet walls would be tall, cool rooms, and a patio with a fountain. Where, I wondered, could one get out in a hurry, if need be? And whose cars were those two which stood before the front door?

"Wait, Ray," I said, when he would have yanked the old-fashioned bell-pull at the door. "Rule number one, and you'd better learn it now. Don't be in a hurry to enter a place until you know who might be in it and how you can get out if trouble starts."

"But isn't this Yolanda's house?" he asked.

I didn't bother to answer. I walked up to the two cars and felt their radiators. They were both very hot. I ran my hands into the side pockets of the doors. Nothing. There was a government map on the seat of the rear car, but it told me nothing I did not know. Leaving the car, I went to the narrow alleyway which, like the tradesman's entrance it probably was, gave entrance to a rear door at the back end of the house. I tried that back door. It was locked from the inside.

"All right, Ray," I said. "Pull the bell."

To the Indian manservant who presently answered the bell I gave our names. We waited, then, and I was astonished at the sound of my own excited pulses beating in my ears. It seemed as if Yolanda would never come, and I cursed myself for my impatience.

What did this girl mean in my life? I asked myself angrily. Not a damn thing! I would be dead in six months, so what could any girl mean?

THE Indian returned, bowed us in. We followed him through a long, dim corridor and into a salon as large as a hotel lobby. There, foreshortened by the distance across that huge room, was Yolanda coming to meet us. And behind her were four officers who stood regarding us intent-

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ly, and, I saw at once, with no smile of welcome.

But I had no eyes for them, only for Yolanda. Lord, but she was beautiful! She had changed to a house dress of black, clinging stuff, and her face, by contrast, looked startlingly white. It *was* white. She was worried about something. There were dark shadows beneath her black eyes and upon her cheeks were bright spots of color.

"Oh," she whispered, "but I am glad you came!"

Ray was grinning from ear to ear. He shuffled his feet and could not stop looking at her.

"Listen, Yolanda," I said softly, "there's trouble down town and—"

Her eyes warned me. So there was trouble here, too, eh? Then she was presenting us to the others. To her father, General Garcia, a short, straight, aging man, whose white mustache and goatee gave him an air of great dignity and whose anxious black eyes were very like Yolanda's.

"I remember you, *señor,*" he said, bowing. "You taught at the flying school here in 1931, yes?"

"Yes, my general," I said, liking him instantly.

I remembered when he and the president had inspected the school. With curious clarity I remembered that it had been he, not President Muñoz, whom the men had cheered.

Then Yolanda was presenting a Major Valdez, a Captain Diavista, and the young lieutenant with whom she had clinched at the landing field, Lieutenant Arturo Jerez.

Mechanically I shook hands with them all, and my lips acknowledged their names. But I hardly heard them. I found my senses suddenly becoming alert, and a warning bell jangling in the back of my mind. After you have fooled around long enough, you develop an extra sense for nosing out trouble, and I knew there was trouble in this room—or would be, very shortly. Oh, things looked safe and pleasant enough; just Yolanda, her father, and three army officers. Yet there was something in the air, something I could not put a name to, that made my skin prickle with uneasiness.

"Forgive me, *caballeros,*" I said, in the florid Spanish fashion, "but I came with a message for the *señorita* and her father."

"Speak, *señor,*" the general said, and, as he lighted a dark Mexican cigarette, I could see that his thin old hands were shaking.

"I have heard rumors," I said, looking carefully at those other officers, "that the San Lorenzan army will break at midnight and that—"

"I told you, general," Major Valdez said, and I could swear that the flame of triumph blazed in his eyes.

"—and that the Costaranean army will be in the city by daybreak," I finished.

The color had faded from Yolanda's cheeks. Her bright red lips were pressed together in a tight line. She looked at me.

"It is time, with my father's permission," she said, "to take the plane and see what we can do."

This Major Valdez broke in. "A million pardons," he said, with a cutting edge to his voice that sounded strange in the presence of his general, "but it is time for us to do what we have been discussing."

"I shall not surrender my First Army," the old man said. His dark eyes flamed at the major, who returned his look with unveiled insolence. "There is still a chance. I shall

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return to the front now. Lieutenant Jerez—Arturo—will you go with me?"

THE gaze of the young lieutenant wavered. He glanced at Major Valdez, then at Yolanda. But before he could find his voice Ray broke in.

"We're butting into a family argument, seems like," he said. "Yolanda, what—"

"Pipe down, Ray!" I snapped.

"General," said Major Valdez, giving a cold eye to Ray, "in behalf of the officers of the First Army, we are empowered to offer you these terms: Send word to South Pass for the soldiers to withdraw, and come with us in the plane to the west coast, or—"

"In what plane?" Ray demanded.

I took a long breath. I could feel the four walls of the room closing in on us. I could not stop Ray from talking, and every word he spoke brought the walls a little closer. Funny that he could not feel it, too. Or maybe he could, and did not care. Didn't I say his character was changing right before my eyes?

Desperately I wanted to get him out of the room before the trouble started. And Yolanda, too. It would be no place for them in just a few minutes now.

"Ray," I begged, "take Yolanda in the other room a minute, will you? I know something about this country, and I might be able to—"

But that did not work. A quick flush appeared beneath the sallow skin of young Jerez, and Ray looked at me as if I had suddenly, astonishingly, double-crossed him. Yolanda, too, frowned as she gazed at me, and the tight line of her lips quirked upward at the corners.

"Ray, did you hear me?" I snapped. I did not even look at her. I was looking at Jerez. His hand was inching down the seam of his crimson trousers toward the holster of his gun. Well, that was all right if things had to start. I slipped my fist into my side pocket, where Whitey's gun lay nestled. All I wanted now was to postpone the inevitable until Ray and Yolanda got out. "General," I begged, "won't you ask your daughter to show Don Ray the library—if you have one? Don Ray, in truth, is inexperienced in such matters and—"

"Don't bother, father," Yolanda said in a flat voice. "Don Ray, will you come?"

She turned, giving me a look that seared my very brain.

Ray hesitated. I dared not look at him. I did not want him to read what was in my mind, and I had to watch Jerez, who was close to the exploding point. I heard Ray move away. The door behind me closed, and I knew an instant of utter relief.

"General Garcia," I said slowly, "if you wish to accompany me in the Apex bomber, there is at least a chance we can stop the Costaraneans from advancing."

Jerez still regarded that closed door as if hypnotized by it. I dared take my eyes away from him for an instant to look at Valdez. A blue vein was jumping in his forehead, and his white-rimmed eyes were expanded in sudden fury.

Behind him stood Captain Diavista. I could not see his hand; that worried me. Slowly, so as not to precipitate matters, I moved over beside General Garcia.

It did not seem right that he should be standing there, so alone, so surrounded by the miasma of treachery.

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I tried once again to stall things off. "Lieutenant Jerez," I said quietly, "am I right in thinking you are related to Señorita Garcia?"

"I am to marry her," he snapped.

"You were to marry her, you mean," the old man snapped.

I EXPECTED it then, and had Jerez's fingers moved one more inch I should have killed him. But something happened that I did not expect—had not taken into my calculations.

The Indian manservant entered on soundless feet.

"Your Excellency," he said "Señor Shattuck."

And Whitey Shattuck entered, his pale eyes narrowed. His face bore a huge cross of surgeon's plaster. His arms were crossed over his chest, both hands inside the opening of his jacket.

"Ah," he said. "Just in time, *señores,* eh? Hank, isn't this nice, seeing you again so soon?"

He bowed very slightly to the general, who made no movement in reply.

Now my gun was covering Whitey. He knew it, too, and his bloodless lips twitched into a sardonic grin.

"Major Valdez," he said, "is everything arranged?"

"No," the major said. "The general refuses to join us. We shall have to do without him."

"Too bad," Whitey said. "I could have used his influence later."

"*You* could?" the general gasped. He turned suddenly and gazed full into the uneasy face of Lieutenant Jerez. "Arturo," he said, in an unbelieving voice, "I understand now. Tell me, son, are you in this? Your family and mine have been friends and neighbors for three hundred years. Can it be that you have sold your country for a handful of pesos? Tell me, Arturo—speak?"

I knew it was going to happen. But I did not realize that this was the exact moment. I was watching that youngster squirm and grow pale under the accusing eyes of the man who was to have been his father-in-law. So for that one instant I took my eyes off Whitey Shattuck.

I saw the boy's uneasy eyes focus over my shoulder and widen with quick horror. Then, of course, I spun around. But it was too late to stop him. I'd have had to shoot through the old man's body to have gotten him. In that single split-second Whitey Shattuck had swiftly side-stepped. He was standing directly behind the general, and had placed his gun against that aged white head.

I grabbed at my gun and threw my body toward the general. But it was no use.

Quite calmly, Whitey pulled the trigger.

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIFIC CRASH.

THE muzzle of my gun caught in the lining of my pocket. My body, still moving, struck that of the falling general. That enabled him, already dead, to do what I had not been able to do for him—he saved my life.

Whitey's next bullet was meant for me. But the general's slim old figure folded over mine as it fell. I heard Whitey's bullet thud into it. The general and I hit the floor together, but I had my gun out by the time I crashed.

A man towered over me. He was holding an automatic and pointing it

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straight down at me. Behind that automatic was the convulsed face of Captain Diavista. Where was Whitey? He was the one I wanted. But my own gun exploded. I saw Diavista's blouse button jerk, but the bullet, ranging upward, ricocheted, and what it did to his face was a terrible thing to see.

I rolled out from under the general. Diavista's bubbling scream clawed at my eardrums. I danced to my feet, side-stepping automatically. Diavista, his frantic hands pawing at what had once been a face, was between me and Whitey, who was carefully, patiently waiting for him to get out of the way. I pushed the sightless, noseless captain into him and whirled just in time to duck under the flaming gun of Major Valdez.

It is queer how calm, in a moment when the whole world has exploded into violence, one's mind can be. Time expanded, stretched out. There seemed plenty of time to see everything. The only trouble was that one's muscles would not work as fast as the brain commanded. It never occurred to me that I might live through the next ten seconds of this whirling chaos, but that was all right. I was due to close the book anyway. But I did want to take some of these double-crossing lice with me.

Like unrelated snapshots, pictures of that battle now come back to me as I sit aside, thinking. Young Jerez, jerking frenziedly at his gun, which appeared to be stuck in his holster. The general—though he could not be alive—pulling his legs up and kicking them down—just once. Valdez, trying to follow me with his guns as I danced lightly to right and to left while my own weapon swung up with comforting speed. Diavista—and still I get a laugh out of this one—clawing blindly at Whitey, screaming the while, and turning Whitey into a scarecrow of bloody clothes. I remember Whitey's face as he tried to throw Diavista aside so he could shoot me.

Nor was that all that remains in that single snapshot out of the past. The door to the library had opened. Ray, tugging at his gun, was coming out on the double. And just behind him was Yolanda, her face deathly white as she saw what had happened in the few instants since that first gunshot.

"Go back!" I yelled at Ray. "Go back!"

Now—it seemed ages since I had started to lift my gun—it was up, aimed straight at Valdez's belly. I squeezed the trigger and laughed out loud as his dark face changed expression. He dropped his gun, and bent slowly over like a small boy who has eaten too many green apples. I hoped he would take a nice long time in dying.

I heard a new note in the uproar that seemed to be shaking the entire world of flame and noise and gunsmoke. My eyes found it. Five or six Latins were racing into the room. Two had guns, the others knives. Whitey was yelling at them. They started for me.

That, of course, settled it. I got one, then my gun clicked emptily. I had no memory of using the other cartridges. I heaved the gun straight into the grinning mouth of the nearest Latin, then whirled, looking for Ray.

You wouldn't believe it, but that engineer, that man of slide rules and T-squares, was grinning as if he were having the time of his life. He hadn't bothered to shoot young Jerez. He did not realize, you see, that this was something more than a freshman-sophomore class-rush. They were locked in one an-

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other's arms, and Ray was taking the time to throttle him. I covered the territory in two steps. I jammed my thumb in Jerez's eye. That broke them up. I threw the full weight of my body into Ray, got him started toward the door.

EVERYBODY in the world seemed to be on me as I yanked Yolanda by the arm and slammed her through the open doorway. A gun banged somewhere behind me and a bright hot pain lanced into my back, just below the shoulder blade. That one, it seemed to me, would just about do it.

I staggered, caught myself, and got the door slammed behind me. Yolanda's hands, slender and capable as they slid through my range of vision, bolted the door.

"Hot ziggity," cheered Ray happily. "If that wasn't some schemozzle, I'm a shimmy dancer."

I wanted to sit down and rest. But the strange thing was that all I could think of then was the plane. It seemed, somehow, a haven of refuge in that storm which had swept over us, and was waiting just beyond three inches of wood to sweep again. That beautiful big ship, that every one had thought jinxed; in some way, I thought dully, she would take care of us.

"Come on," I said steadily enough, "let's get going. They'll be here in a minute."

Ray, the damn fool, looked disappointed. He was just beginning to enjoy himself, it seemed, and he wanted some more.

"The plane, of course," Yolanda said quickly. "Dad would have wanted us to carry on."

Good kid, Yolanda. Daughter of twenty generations of fighting men, she was, and she showed it now. A dozen bullets smacked through the panel of the door.

I did not move quite fast enough, and she stared at me oddly. I grinned into her lovely face.

"Nice, quiet house you have here, sister," I said. "Let's go, if there's a back way out."

The big door bulged on its hinges. Ray, as happy as a clam on ice, placed the muzzle of his gun an inch from the panel and fired three times. There was a wild shriek from the other side, but it had a Latin flourish to it that was not, unfortunately, Whitey's.

"What are you going to do for cartridges," I snarled at him, "when those are gone?"

"Come on, please," Yolanda begged, plucking at my sleeve—the wrong one. I cursed her when the pain drove into me like a blazing knife. She stared at me and made no answer. "Please," she said, "before they steal dad's car."

I retain a vague impression of running through two or three big rooms, of brushing the ashen-faced manservant out of the way, of gulping down long breaths of sweet night air. They steadied me, seemed to soothe racking pain that tore at me.

All I wanted now was to find the plane. It seemed very important. We had treated her badly, leaving her in a place, alone, where nobody would understand her. Even where people should have understood her they called her a jinx.

What treatment could she expect here, where everything was topsy-turvy, where Ray acted as if he had been suckled on bayonets and Yolanda was looking at me as if she had never seen me before?

Well, she had better take a good look at me, for this was my night to die. I

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was sure of it. But there were things I wanted to do first.

There was a denim-clad soldier sitting at the wheel of a third car—Whitey's car, I guessed. It was an expensive car of American make. I opened the side door—the door on his side. Ray's hand shot in ahead of me, grabbed the soldier by the throat and snapped him out of the seat with a jerk that made the man land heavily on the back of his neck.

THEN Ray was in the seat. I clambered wearily into the back. Yolanda came in beside me, bringing the sweet fragrance of her into that stuffy interior. I wished, somehow, that she had gotten in front with Ray. It was disturbing, having her with me. The car leaped ahead like a kicked cat.

"Where to?" Ray shouted; and there was a whoop of excitement in his voice.

"You tell him, Yolanda," I said, wanting to sink deep into the blessed painlessness of sleep.

She said "Right," and then "Left," but I was not paying attention. Street lights flowed past, dotting the bright ribbon of pain that was sliding through my brain.

I fought off wave after wave of pain-soaked dizziness while I watched at each turn in the highway for the old hangar where the Apex was. I felt that once I had settled in the seat behind the big control wheel everything would be all right.

"Left," Yolanda's voice said. Then, directly to me, "Hank, you are hurt!"

"No," I said. "Just a scratch. Did you say we were close?"

"Where is it—the scratch?" she asked. She bent toward me in her anxiety, and her sweet young face, so lovely, so vivid, was close to mine. Every nerve and muscle in my body told me to go ahead and kiss her. What did it matter now? I could kiss her, could savor the tonic fragrance of her lips, and Ray need know nothing of it.

With me dead, the rest would be up to him. But she lifted her head suddenly and looked through the back window.

"Some one is following us, Hank," she said.

And there was. We were running along a straight, narrow highway. Broad fields were on each side, the lights of Puerto Lucia a couple of miles back. And between us and the city were the two bright beams of a motor car's headlights.

"How much farther is it?" I asked Yolanda.

"Two miles, perhaps."

I leaned forward against the solid wall of pain that confronted me.

"Ray," I said, "give her the gas. We left the bomber heading out into the field, remember?"

"Sure," he said, with maddening cheerfulness.

"All right. When we get there, swing the car around the hangar. Leave her headed toward town with the engine running and your door open."

"What—" he began.

"Shut up, I'm telling you!" I snapped. "Then you and Yolanda beat it for the plane, get the engines started, and roll out on the field. Wait a minute or two for me. If I don't come, get into the air. Yolanda can handle her. And if anything happens to me, fly up to Mexico City and see the ambassador there. He can do more than anybody to straighten the mess out."

"Hank!" Yolanda's voice came

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softly to my ears. "What are you going to do?"

I GLANCED back through the window. The approaching headlights had increased in size, but Ray's foot was now tramping hard on the accelerator and I thought we were holding our own.

"I think I know how to stop them," I said.

"You—you are lying to me!" she said shakily.

I took a long breath. I was trembling from head to foot—not with pain, nor the knowledge of approaching catastrophe, but because she was sitting there so close to me that merely by reaching out with my good right arm I could draw her dear face down to mine.

Well, I would take one bright memory with me, anyway.

Her lips were soft and sweet against mine. All pain was magically gone as I held her there against me. A deep sense of contentment stole through me, driving away all the confusion, all the misery that had hagged me ever since the doctors had told me I could not live. I could die in the next three minutes and everything would be all right!

The car swung sharply, throwing us apart. The dark outline of the old hangar looked up in the blackness. The two mechanics came running out, their searchlights inquisitive.

Ray eased quickly out of his seat.

I whispered, "Take care of Ray!"

I heard the breath catch in her throat. But her door came open and she vanished in the blackness. I jumped to the ground, slid into the other seat, jerked on the gear lever. The little car bounded ahead. I pulled it back onto the road and glanced at the speedometer. Twenty miles an hour would do it—and it might give me a chance, too.

That was a new thought. I hadn't counted on that.

I headed straight up the road. The other car was close now. The two headlights grew big, blinded me. They seemed to be going very slowly; then, as the distance between us contracted, the car seemed almost to leap through the darkness. I was on my own side of the road. I opened my door, put both feet out upon the running board. The entire world grew bright, then blazed with blinding incandescence.

Now! I squirmed out from under the wheel and stood on the running board. I pulled the wheel violently. There was a high-pitched squeal of rubber tires. The two sets of headlights seemed to blend into one. I hurled myself off the running board just as a terrific crash blotted out all other sounds.

CHAPTER VII.

A JOKE ON THE COSTARANEANS.

FOR an instant I lay there in a pool of pain. I could not believe that I was not dead. A tiny red flicker attracted my attention in that unearthly silence. Then a voice was lifted in a yell of agony. And at the same moment brilliant flames leaped high from the wreckage of the two cars.

I pushed myself to my feet. My left side was numb. It did not hurt much now. It had gotten past the hurting stage. The wreckage was blazing with a dull, rumbling roar, through which I could hear the screaming of that single voice.

"Hank!" it shrieked. "Hank Roberts!"

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It was Whitey, imprisoned somewhere in that blazing inferno. Automatically I ran toward it until I came up against the solid barrier of heat. He was somewhere underneath, hidden by the crumpled steel of the motor car bodies. No chance in the world. Not a chance, even, to rescue a friend. But still, it was pretty horrible.

Dully, hopelessly, I looked about me. A tire, thrown from the wheel, smoked acridly, ten feet away from the holocaust. Something right at my feet caught my eye. It was a gun. And there was a hand holding the butt. A hand, but no arm.

I caught it up, tore the hand loose. The thing burned my fingers as I aimed it in the direction of that unseen voice that was continuing to scream long after merciful death should have shut it off. I fired a full clip into those erupting flames, and after the fourth shot the screams ceased as suddenly as they had started. I dropped the hot gun, blowing automatically upon my fingers.

I walked away from that fire. I was not sorry for Whitey. Not even very sorry on account of the way he had died. If he had not screamed that way I would not have been sorry at all. He had it coming to him for the things he had done, for all the people he had killed before he himself got it. I was glad he was dead.

"Hank! Are you all right?"

Ray came panting into the dim refulgence from the flames. Yolanda was right behind him. Ray grabbed my bad arm and I shoved him away with all the strength I had.

"Why aren't you in that plane?" I snarled.

"Oh, all right," Ray said calmly. "But you gave me a scare."

Yolanda did not say anything. She just came very close and stared hard into my face. In silence I avoided her eyes and trudged tiredly toward the plane.

The motors were purring. They sounded good. The only real sounds in a world of unreality. My ears were greedy for their sweet song. While I could hear that noise, everything was all right.

I tried twice before I could get my foot up on the first stirrup.

"Hank!" Ray cried. "What's the matter? Are you hurt?"

"No, damn you! Push me up."

His strong hand gave me a boost. I was up there at last. With a heartfelt sigh of relief I sank into the deep cushions of the pilot's seat. My fingers stole lovingly around the friendly wheel. Said she was a jinx, did they?

"You stay here, Yolanda," I called, "until—"

But there was no use calling. She was right there beside me. She was sitting down behind the dual control wheel, and Ray was standing at the entrance to the catwalk.

"Get out of here!" I yelled at her. "What do you think this is—a joy hop?"

Then her eyes blazed angrily at me. "And whose country is this, Hank Roberts?" she cried. "And whose father was murdered a few minutes ago?"

BEFORE I could answer she had reached forward and slapped the throttles with the flat of her hand. What could you do with a girl like that? I felt too sick to even wonder. A fit mate for a fighting man! Well, it would have been too wonderful. It just wasn't written in the book.

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The big bomber was racing across the black field. The wheel was jumping and jerking against my right hand. She wanted to lift, to fly, and I let her. The place for both of us was in the air, and she took it joyously. Some of her boundless strength was transmitted to me, and I felt better. Or maybe I was getting light-headed. As we slashed up into sky I wanted to sing, to clog my feet against the rudder pedals. Everything was all right now. Yolanda, Ray, the beautiful new bomber, and I, all together, roaring off across the horizons. Too bad I could not stay with the others to the very end of the trail.

I straightened out, glanced at the softly glowing compass, and headed toward South Pass. My side was not hurting any more. There was no feeling in it, so I was free to enjoy myself. Carefully turning my head, I could see Yolanda sitting alertly beside me.

Her piquant profile was etched cameo-clear by the reflected lights from the instrument board, and never in my life had I seen anything half so beautiful.

Now she turned to me and pointed downward through the windscreen. Bathed in a silver wash from a rising half-moon, the national highway squirmed below us like a great lazy snake. And on it were tiny, foreshortened figures. Here a few; just ahead an increasing number. We thundered over a motor truck, then a field piece. And in a very few seconds the stragglers had turned into a disorganized mob of men, all straggling away from the front.

"The retreat!" Ray yelped from behind me. "I'll go back into the gunner's coop. The grenades are in there. Hundreds of them!"

Great black lumps of mountains swung in as if to block the speeding plane. I followed the winding highway, knowing that it led through the pass. The mountains loomed up beside us. But I had been through there before, and I knew there was room, even for such a ship as the Apex.

Below us the road was now black with men. The rout was on. Whitey's money had done the trick, but his estate would never collect what was due him—if I could only hang on for a few minutes more. I was having increasing difficulty in holding the ship. The numbness in my left side seemed to be spreading.

THERE, just ahead, a million fireflies were darting around. Odd place for fireflies. With some difficulty I realized that they weren't fireflies. That was the battle front up there. At least the San Lorenzans were putting up some kind of a rear guard action.

Yolanda's slim finger was pointing ahead, and I nodded gravely as I nosed down a trifle to cut the height from Ray. Now the mountains were crowding us. That wasn't so good. I would have to be very careful. If my reactions became much slower I might try to knock a mountain over.

The bright dots of gunfire moved rapidly closer. The colorful blossoms which were shell bursts began to flower directly under us. The Apex, feeling the churned-up air from those explosions, began to buck and leap. I hung on grimly. This would have to be quick. I knew now that I couldn't hold on very much longer.

The San Lorenzan army were bunched below us. Then, suddenly, there were no men at all. Just ahead were a dozen blinking eyes of fire,

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then more and more. Machine guns. I heard myself laugh crazily as I leaned on the wheel and sent the big ship hurtling straight down at them. So they didn't want the Apex, these Costaraneans! Now they would know what they had passed up. I'd shove the Apex right into their teeth and make them eat it!

I hoped those inspectors were down there somewhere behind the machine guns. I hoped they would look up and recognize the snarling battle-bird they had called hoodooed!

I pulled up not fifty feet from those flashing machine guns. We screamed over them, weaving as we followed the slowly rising pass. I hadn't much strength left, but I had enough to do this. I could feel the tail kick up as the first of Ray's grenades exploded in our wake. We were sowing seeds of flame down there, sowing it with generous hands.

There was the main army now. Confident of success, made bold by the San Lorenzan rout, they had left their trenches and were now marching serenely along the road. We pounced upon them, dropped death into those massed ranks. I could see them scattering into the ditches as flames leaped into being among them. Now who was jinxed!

Roaring through the gorge just over their heads and fighting the wheel as the tail bounced and jerked, I suddenly heard somebody laughing. Through all that hell of sound the crazy laughter cut.

It was a terrible sound, and I did not like it. I glanced at Yolanda and she was staring at me with a horrified expression on her face. Slowly I realized that it was I who was laughing. But I could not stop.

What a joke this was on the Costaraneans! And on the American inspectors, and on the transport operators who had not believed in this stout-hearted ship and had turned it down for inferior jobs! In the morning the whole world would know that they had guessed wrong! But the joke was on me, too. I wouldn't be here to know what they said! Even that struck me as funny. And where were the doctors who had told me I could never fly again? I hoped they weren't so busy sentencing people to death that they couldn't read the papers.

A mountain leaped at my left wing, and I was almost too tired to get out of its way. I stopped laughing and threw all my weight on the wheel.

Slowly, reluctantly, the mountain moved away. But I could not dodge another. I was all through. Finished. I looked at Yolanda. Her two strong hands were ready.

"Guess you—better—take her!" I called with what strength I had. I felt the wheel move under my hand and knew she had taken over. Good kid, Yolanda. She and Ray would be a fine combination.

I was pleasantly drowsy. It was nice, as darkness crept over me and all sounds faded, to know we were still together in the air, Yolanda, and Ray, and the beautiful bomber—and I. I could go to sleep feeling just fine about everything. So I did.

I LAY quite still, trying to gather courage to open my eyes. It did not seem worth while. I felt, somehow, as if I had been cheated. No sense of relief at being still alive crossed my mind. What had I to come back to? A reprieve, that was all. A few more days, weeks, or months, waiting for death.

Then I became conscious of a

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strange fact. Something was the matter with my right hand. I could not move it. The trouble, I recalled with an effort, had been with my left side and arm. So what had happened to my right hand?

I opened my eyes and blinked as a shaft of light beat into them from the interstices of the Venetian blinds which covered a large window by my bed. I stared down at my right hand and discovered it was being held tightly by a small, slender fist. Following the arm attached to that strange fist, I discovered Yolanda, and then I felt better right away.

"How do you feel, Hank?" she asked in that throaty contralto that I remembered so well.

"Swell!" I said. "Scram. I'm going to get up."

"No, you aren't—not for two or three weeks."

It was nice, having her hand there. The warmth of it spread up through my arm and into my body. I could feel my heart beat loudly under that stimulus. I must have dozed off, then, because when I next opened my eyes the room was dark except for a tiny bed light, but Yolanda's hand was still there.

I released it, and she sat up with a sigh of relief. She chafed her hand and arm as if she had been holding it in one position for a very long time. I had almost forgotten how beautiful she was. Her eyes were so wide and dark under their heavy lashes, and her skin so clear and smooth, it was hard to imagine she had ever witnessed scenes of greater violence than the nine o'clock rush at the doors of the National Grand Opera.

"Where," I said, remembering things that were not so nice to think about, "is Ray?"

"Outside," she said, nodding toward the door.

"I want to see him."

She hesitated, then went to the door. I could see now that this was a hospital room. I recognized the shiny white bed table and the neat array of tumblers and medicines.

"Hi, kid," Ray said, following Yolanda into the room. "How's tricks?"

"Fine," I said. "Now sit down and tell me what happened after I left the party last night."

"Last night?" he echoed. "Your hang-over lasted forty hours. Now go to sleep and we'll tell you all about it tomorrow."

"Tell me now," I said, "or I'll get out of this bed and hang a shanty on you."

He grinned happily. "You're almost well," he said. "I can tell by the way you talk. Well, what we did to the Costaranean army was something! We stopped them as if they had hit a brick wall. You can find eyeballs and kneecaps over an area of five square miles. And the San Lorenzans took a stand on their own ten-yard line when they saw us kicking the ball around. They came back and began to run through the Costaranean line for a touchdown and—"

"And listen, Hank," Yolanda interrupted. "Yesterday morning the San Lorenzan flyers took the plane to the Third Army airdrome, and they fitted regular bomb racks on her fuselage and machine guns in all the cockpits, and—"

"And," Ray broke in excitedly, "what that Apex did to the Costies was something to tell mother and the girls! I went along—" Now he looked abashed, and his eyes did not meet mine. "You know, just to observe the action of the ship under war con-

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ditions. And we went to the capital, El Centro, of Costarano, and bombed it. And that, Hank, isn't all. Two spavined-looking Comets came out to drive us off. We shot one out of the air as easily as you would toss a penny to an organ-grinder's monkey. The other made a forced landing and rolled over. We laid an egg on the remains. And did we have fun!"

HE went over to the table and picked up two cablegram forms. Holding them under the dim light, he read them to me. One was a confirmation of the sale of the Apex to the San Lorenzan army. The other a personal cable from Mr. Avery, president of the company. It said:

ALL IS FORGIVEN STOP COME HOME TO PAPA AND GO TO WORK STOP MUST DESIGN SISTER SHIPS OF BOMBER FOR TRANSPORT USE STOP AND TEST DUPLICATES FOR NAVY STOP HURRY AND STOP YOUR HELLING AROUND STOP P. J. AVERY.

It was nice to get a message like that, but of course it didn't do me any good. I was through flying, unless I could get somebody to go along as safety pilot.

"Fine, kid," I said. "But I guess I'll stay here. I like the climate, and the liquor is good, so you'd better catch the next Pan-American plane going north and tell Avery that I've gone native and that I'm staying down here a while longer."

A sudden change came over Ray's face. He glanced at Yolanda as if there were some deep secret shared between them.

"Shall I ask him now?" Ray said.

"Yes," Yolanda nodded.

"Hank," Ray said slowly, "did you know there was another piece of metal in your body beside Whitey's bullet?"

"Yes," I said tiredly. "I knew it."

"Did you know it was in a place," he went on, choosing his words very carefully, "where it was likely to knock you off at any minute?"

"Yes, I knew that, too."

Ray took a long breath. He looked lingeringly at Yolanda.

"You see?" she said. "I told you."

I flared, "Stop being cryptic! What is it all about? I knew I was going to bounce off any time, but what difference did it make? I was due to run out of my luck anyway, testing planes and all that. So let me do the worrying, will you?"

Ray reached down and took my hand. "Listen, old timer," he said. "Yolanda's going to tell you something pretty soon, but I want to tell you something first. I've decided not to go back to the factory. I sort of like this life down here.

"This morning a bird offered me a swell job in Bolivia. An engineering job. And I'm going to take it. After all, we might as well get some fun out of life as we go along. So give my love and kisses to the gang at the factory. I've got to run along now. I'm catching a plane south. I'll drop you a line and give you my address. And when you and Yolanda settle down, I'll come up some time to see you. S'long, old pal!"

AND before I could even open my mouth to speak, he had hurried across the room, opened the door and disappeared. Yolanda was standing at the window, looking out.

"Hank," she said, not even glancing at me, "they were probing around inside you, and they got both pieces of metal out—the bullet and the splinter of steel. They say you'll be all right in a few weeks."

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"So?" I said, conscious of no great uplift. My brain was tired, and it was hard to puzzle things out. "And is that why Ray ran off like that, because I—"

"He asked me to marry him," Yolanda said. "And I would not, because I did not love him." She turned and came over to the bed. Her face was very pale, but her eyes were brave. "I told him—that—that I loved you and—"

"Yolanda!" I said, reaching for her with my one good arm.

But she stood away from me, determined to have her say.

"—and when the doctors told me about the piece of steel, I said you loved me too, but would not say so on account of expecting to die. And because he was your friend, too. He said you did not love me—did not love any girl—but if you said you knew about the piece of steel, and expected to die, then he would believe me. And you did. And he believed me. So he went away."

She smiled tremulously. "And now perhaps you do not love me, and I have lied to him. But I would not marry him anyway, do you understand?"

The room whirled around my dizzy head. A new life stretched out before me. I was free to fly, to love and be loved, free to tell this lovely girl all the things that were in my heart. Only the thought of Ray bothered me. But Ray, too, was entering upon a new life, was finding a new world of adventure in which a wife would never fit. He would have a brief period of heartbreak; then, in Bolivia somewhere, he would meet another girl, and Yolanda would remain in his mind only as a vague, sweet picture.

Yolanda turned toward the door and reached for the handle.

"Where are you going?" I demanded.

"Home."

"Listen to me," I said fiercely. "If you don't come here and kiss me, I'll get out of bed and chase you, and then you'd have my death on your conscience all the rest of your life and—"

But I could say no more because her lips were on mine, and they were as sweet as they had been during that ecstatic moment on the Apex when the whole world was exploding in violence. Good old Apex! Had it not been for her, Yolanda would not have been in my arms. Did I remember that some one called her a jinx ship, a hoodoo?

THE END

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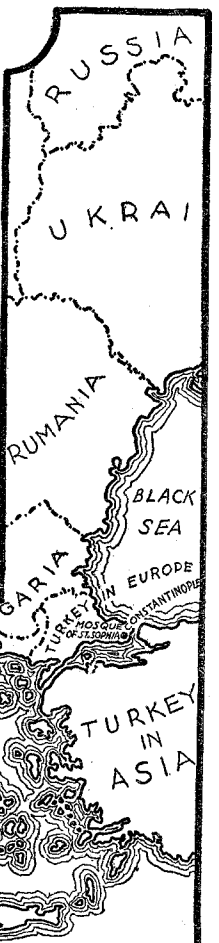
Wonders of the World

The MOSQUE of ST. SOPHIA

ON the highest of Constantinople's seven hills stands the Mosque of St. Sophia. This supreme example of Byzantine art was built by order of the great Emperor Justinian between 532 and 537 A.D. One hundred master builders and ten thousand workmen were employed upon the structure and the cost of the building has been estimated at an equivalent of at least fifty million dollars.

The dome rises to a height of one hundred and eighty feet. To render it as light as possible, it was constructed of pumice stone and Rhodian bricks. The whole interior is lined with costly marbles, and the decorations present a riot of Oriental color. To add to the splendor of the mosque, the famous temples of the ancient gods at Heliopolis, Baalbec, Ephesus, and Athens were plundered of their columns.

Built as a Christian church, it was transformed into a Mohammedan mosque by invading Moslems during 1453. During recent years the Turkish government has been converting it into a magnificent museum.



"A Superb Monument midway between Europe and Asia"

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Glory Road

By ROBERT CARSE

Author of "Revolt in Ventura," "The Drums Roar," etc.

Two Legionnaires help wage tribal warfare against a relentless enemy in the heart of darkest Africa

CHAPTER I.

"THE LEGION ALWAYS FIRST!"

THE days did not seem long now; those hours of terrible marching under a sky which was like the opened gates of a furnace and over a desert which was a veritable hell—those hours were all but forgotten.

Pistol in hand, he fought desperately

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Even their thirst was nearly forgotten. All of the Legion men and the black men of the Senegalese *tirailleurs* seemed now to keep only one thought.

Ahead, there on the last low dune-rise before the rusted reddish walls of the cliffs of El Hank, was the water-hole. There, also, flat against the sand, calm, waiting, were the men of the 'R Guebait and their captives, and slaves that this *razzou,* a raiding party, had caught in its swift expedition down across the Sahara into the Sudan. The tribesmen of that *razzou* had water now, and were in the better position. And they were content in this moment. The Legion section and the company of Senegalese riflemen, they who had been flung North from Timbuktu to intercept, capture or destroy this

They were closing in about him

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razzou, were waterless, and had been so for over thirty hours. Ahead, for them, was one of two things: water, and life—or death.

It was all very simple, Bowan thought. Just as simple as that. And men fought well when faced with such simplicity of purpose, of absolute, elemental need. He looked at his own men, the mounted section of the Legion. They were Europeans, all of them, but their postures, their expressions now in this place, were those of quiet, almost of ease. They rested flatly in the sand, nursing their weapons, regaining their breath and their strength for the attack, for that ultimate assault which they knew would soon come.

Bowan's big sergeant, Volk, a Luxembourger with a face like a badly cured ham and a row of decoration and campaign ribbons all the way across the left breast of his faded khaki tunic, knelt crouched behind him, and spoke in a husky, rasping whisper: "Everything is ready, Lieutenant. Whenever you wish. The boys are all dressed for the dance. How many men do you want left with the mules?"

Bowan named them, in the same sort of a rasping voice. They were the wounded and the lamed, but they stared up as they heard the lieutenant calling off their names. They muttered in protest, and then were silent, as Volk turned and cursed them. "Do you want," he asked, "full water *guerbas*, or your own ears shoved down your throats?"

The Senegalese rifle company, numerically superior to the Legion group, flanked it on both wings. They also lay flatly behind wind-blown ridges of sand, eying the further crest which hid the *razzou* of the 'R Guebait, and the muddied water-hole. The Senegalese were stripping off their khaki tunics, their white undershirts and their rifle belts.

And upon the piled garments they were letting slip their Lebel rifles and their scabbarded bayonets.

From the waists of their breeches to their fuzzed and conical skulls where the *chechias*, their red, round felt caps, rested, they were naked. The fierce sun caught upon their black and sweating bodies. Muscles coiled and played in their backs and shoulders. Their mouths showed red and huge as they whispered a little with each other and to their noncoms, and Bowan could see the dull flicker of their sharply filed, stained teeth. "They're going in only with those pig-sticker knives," he said to Volk. "They like ears themselves, don't they?"

VOLK could laugh, through his black, scorched lips. "Only as souvenirs, Lieutenant. But they'll have to go fast, to beat us to the top. . . ."

"No," said Bowan, "that's not the way this job has got to be done. Those guys up on the top are too well armed for that kind of show. Go call Luabala, the *tirailleur* senior lieutenant, over here. Get him yourself; tell him I want to talk to him, and be quick."

Big Volk crawled prone on his stomach to the right flank of the deployed Senegalese, inching along behind each bit of protection and through each minute hollow the sand afforded him. Volk knew the desert and desert fighting, Bowan pondered, and just how much a tribesman treasured each bullet, and could use it. Four or five slapped whining into the mica-brightened sand around Volk as he crawled, and Bowan cursed in his throat. The 'R Guebait were well armed, practically

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as well armed as the men they faced. Those snipers up there worked Winchester and Mannlicher high-power rifles. They are smuggled guns, thought Bowan, bought along the Atlantic coast, or stuff taken in raids upon the weakly protected posts of the *Tercio Etranjero* in the Spanish territory of the Rio del Oro. But then he heard a barked kind of laughter and shouting from the Legionnaires about him.

Luabala, the senior lieutenant and officer commanding the Senegalese unit, was a big man, taller and broader than Volk, and equally as big as Bowan himself. Now, Luabala was coming fully erect to his feet, walking back to where his orderly, hunkered low behind a sand ripple, guarded his horse. He swung up into the saddle in one clean leap.

His crop licked down, and the wearied, shaking mount jerked under him, whinnied, lifted its head and broke into a wild gallop.

In the white, awful downpouring of the sun, against the whitely shimmering desert, horse and man made an utterly majestic picture. Every detail was etched, brought out, made almost unnaturally distinct. Light gleamed upon bit and bridle, glanced irradiantly from the gold braid looping Luabala's *kepi*. It brought highlights from the broad double row of ribbons and the marks of rank upon the tunic cuffs, caught over the highly polished leather of the boots and belts, clean, somehow, even now.

Bowan drew his breath, and sharply swore. That man and horse, galloping along the ridged, open sand, were an invitation to death. They were an insult and a tremendous, stinging jeer to any enemy, and they were, in some way Bowan did not then attempt to understand, a brutally stark and certain proof of all glory.

FOR the 'R Guebait screamed in wild, high voices from above. They nudged up in the fox-holes they had contrived along the commanding ridge. They wasted their precious bullets; they flung them away in round after round, firing at the laughing and erect black man in the saddle and at his straining horse.

Luabala reared the horse back upon its haunches only yards from Bowan. He vaulted from the deep saddle, the reins tight in one huge hand, and, seemingly in the same movement, hauled the mount over and down on its side. Then, for the first time bending and as though aware of the bullets cracking about him, he came to Bowan.

"Your sergeant," he said in his rich, solemn voice, "said you wished to speak with me."

"*Si*," Bowan answered in the colloquial French they spoke between each other. "But what the hell arm of the service do you think you're in, the Spahis or the infantry?"

Luabala laughed slowly and softly at him. "It was just to show them," he said. "Fear is a good thing to have running along an 'R Guebait's trigger finger."

"It will be unless your outfit goes up as soldiers—with the Lebel and bayonet, and not only those damn' knives. We'll have to consolidate once we're up there. We may have to take care of a counter attack."

Luabala shook his head, his great, wide eyes, liquidly alight with small motes of gold, bright in his statuesquely handsome, long-featured and black face. He looked at Bowan and he smiled. There was something archaic about this man, thought Bowan

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strangely. There was about Luabala the impression that here lived again one of the old warriors of the heroic Greek myths.

About him there was nothing negroid, as Bowan knew it, except the color of the skin; the nose, the formation of the skull, the ears and brow and chin, were those of an ancient Greek statue or coin. It was there also in the man's every action, what he did, and how he moved, in the words he said now:

"*Non, mon Lieutenant.* My men are better without the rifles, and the bayonets. That knife is their weapon; they love it as they love nothing else. But now they want blood, and then water. They are thirsty, and impatient. They are telling each other that they know the 'R Guebait are filling their water-bags, giving their camels and captives to drink, and now destroying the water-hole. They want water, very much, and they have come a long way to meet the 'R Guebait. I rode here only because you asked me to come, and for a moment to keep their thoughts from up there. . . ."

"Listen!" Bowan said hoarsely. "We have no exact idea how well that *razzou* is armed, or just how many men it holds. We know, roughly, about fifty. But we know they've got first-class rifles and ammunition. They might also have a machine-rifle, captured from the Spanish, or smuggled in. And then—"

THE cry was inhuman, truly bestial. It came from the Senegalese. Bowan had heard it before, many times: the long-drawn inhalation and the exhalation that ended in the weird, yelping "*Eeh-yi, eh-yi, ha! ha!*"

The Senegalese were up, and charging. They were storming the slope. "Well," Bowan said; he talked to himself. "That tears it!" He swung his whistle up on its chain, gave the short, sharp blast, dropped it, hauling his big American automatic pistol into his hand. "Follow me," he called clearly. "Follow me, *La Légion!*"

The Legionnaires broke from cover like men sprinting before a forest fire. They laughed as they ran, laughing at the Senegalese and their idea that they could beat any Legion unit to the attack. Bowan went four strides before the first wave, running wide and powerfully. But Luabala was already yards in front of him, although he had cut over along the slope to join with his own command.

Bowan stared after him for an instant, then for an instant back. Volk was there, Volk and the crew handling the big Saint Étienne machine-gun had kept their heads; they were bringing the gun and the belt cases forward at a steady dog-trot.

It was as Bowan turned back from marking that when he heard the yammered lash of the machine-rifle from the top of the slope. It broke through the throated yowling of the Senegalese, the lifting drum of rifle fire of the tribesmen and the low, muttered cursing of the Legion. Then Bowan saw that gun. The men handling it dared enough to show themselves openly, on the lipped edge of the circular crest of the dune about the water-hole.

It was an Oviedo, a Spanish gun, small, dark, efficient. In full stride, Bowan brought his pistol around, flailed that gunner and his feeders with every bullet in the clip. Two of them fell away, the gunner and one of the feeders, but the third man grasped it up from the sand again, led a fresh clip in and returned, kneeling and intent, to the point-blank destruction of the

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Senegalese attacking wave right before him.

"Barozzi!" Bowan yelled, swinging to glance towards the rifle-grenadier in the nearest squad. "Give them the heat!"

The bow-legged little Rumanian already had his head bowed over his piece, straightened, holding the stock against his thigh, and pulled the trigger. The grenade blossomed like a flower where it broke. Sand gouted and fell among flame. The gaunt leathered-face, an 'R'Guebait gunner and six more of his fellows lolled in a smoking little pit in the sand when Bowan could see them again. "*Bien!*" Bowan shouted at the rifle-grenadier. "But no more now—some of the damned Senegalese are already up in there! Come on! Run, you rabbits!"

He came panting and slipping shoulder to shoulder with the files on either side down over the other slope of the dune. Even for him, it was like coming from sanity and calm into complete madness. There, it was like the crater of a volcano filled with the furious lava of human struggle and rapid death.

Most of the tribesmen had retreated from the crest after that grenade had wiped out the machine-rifle crew. Here they formed an inner wall, back to back and knee to knee. Their hobbled camels reared and whickered behind them. The immense black captives they had brought from the borders of the Congo with them were shackled and grouped there also. That line surged and tried to break time and again, the massive manacles and leg irons restraining them to a snake-like straining which brought them nowhere. They screamed and mouthed aloud; their eyes were white, vapid discs in their faces. Before them, not yards away, other black men, the Senegalese, were falling thickly in death before their captors.

THE Senegalese leapt striking in with their flat-bladed knives. They smashed against and fell back from the *razzou* as though from a wall. They died grasping at gun muzzles and also when trying to hack in over them. They slipped and fell and did not get up again from over their own dead. They formed a lurching, impenetrable wall for their comrades behind them and for the Legion.

Among them was Luabala. He held an emptied Lebel rifle in his hands by the twisted barrel. The walnut stock was shivered, cracked, slick with blood. In some hand-to-hand struggle up on the crest, he had lost his *kepi* and his impeccable tunic. He fought and looked just like his men around him. When Bowan, who was near by, yelled at him he only turned unrecognizingly and shook his head.

Bowan backed away then. He hit and hauled the Senegalese around him, dragging them aside, yelling in pidgin French to hold back and wait—wait for Volk and the machine-gun to clear the way here. Then he heard the Saint Étienne gun behind him, and the yells of some of the Legionnaires. He wheeled and ran.

Volk was outlined against the sky at the top of the dune. He was crouched over the machine-gun and firing it as fast as the bullets would lead into the breech. A dozen Legionnaires were clustered around him, bent firing over their Lebels, and now battling hand-to-hand with the surge of nearly naked tribesmen who to Bowan seemed to spring right out of the sand itself. Bowan looked back before he started up the slope: it was true, the tribesmen were slipping away still one by one.

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No more than half their original number faced the Senegalese: there was no reason for them to do so. All of the Senegalese except a stumbling, choking, wounded few were dead. . . .

Volk and the men of the Legion gathered about him at the gun were killed as Bowan climbed the slope. They were cut down by shrewd rifle fire from below and behind, and by a direct, maniacal attack of far superior numbers from in front. Bowan got to the gun, he hauled it clear from Volk's body and heaved it around, blistering his hands to the bone.

UNFEELING, unthinking, informed only by savage instinct, he rammed it into action, sprawled behind it, tilting the snub muzzle up at the bare-legged and bearded, scrawny men who sprang at its lipping flame and him as though deathlessly before they at last disappeared. The gun was empty, the belt run through, or the action jammed, when he saw Luabala again. Luabala came up the slope, and in a screaming, insane swarm behind him were the black captives of the 'R Guebait.

Somehow, the heavy, continuous leg chains holding them had been freed. They still wore their hand manacles. But those in themselves were terrible weapons. Bowan screamed at Luabala and at them. He dragged the rear tripod of the gun and a dead tribesman from off his knees. He weaved to his feet with his empty Colt pistol in his hand. He was the last of the Legion, he knew eerily in that moment; he was the last of the Legion alive here.

He opened his mouth and cried words he did not hear and was not afterwards to remember. He said, "The Legion first! Always first!" Then he sprang cat-fashion at the milling line of the 'R Guebait before him. He felt the pistol shock in his hand as the flat barrel struck bone and flesh; he saw faces and flashing, bloody eyes; he felt blows, repeatedly striking his own flesh. But he laughed, as he fell, and got up again, hauling at hairy arms and legs, clawing and smashing at brown, hairy faces.

He, of the Legion, he told himself laughingly, was the last here, but the first in this which was finally victory. He saw Luabala at his side; he tried to talk to Luabala, to tell him that, to jeer and mock the other man. But then he toppled, wheeled around, skidding in the sand among the knotted bodies, and went flat to his face, his eyes shut, his world blackness.

CHAPTER II.

MESSENGER TO TIMBUKTU.

BOWAN looked at the fine and far points of the stars in the sheer, pale blue night sky for a long time, he had counted and named some of them, before he was fully aware that he had returned slowly to consciousness after an interval whose length he could not begin to gauge. He attempted to raise his head, and his arms, and instantly he felt huge, throbbing waves of pain all through him. But his senses were acute now, his eyes clear, and he had raised his head enough to see around him.

He lay now in the midst of a desert camp. Camels were hobbled and rested kneeling and snuffling behind him. A small fire, of the precious desert thorn trees and dried camel dung, burned low and blue almost directly in front of him. Men, tall, quiet blacks, in dull-colored long *djellabas* and loosely worn headcloths, sat there about the fire,

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rifles at their knees as they ate of the leathery jerked mutton and buttered crumbs of the desert man, and others stood beyond in the further darkness, stationed at fixed posts, their guns up in their hands.

Clearly, Bowan knew that he could remember it all: the days of marching forth into the Grand Erg, the great desert, from the low, sprawled walls of Timbuktu, the finding of the trail of the *razzou* four days out, and then that meeting at the water-hole at the dune below the cliffs of El Hank. He was able to recall in clarity each detail of the fighting there. It was as if a motion picture film were steadily unrolled before his eyes. He saw Luabala, riding among the splashed spurts of the 'R Guebait's bullets towards where he lay in the sand among his Legionnaires. He heard again Luabala's laughing words, and his own voice in laughter, and then the sounds as the Senegalese riflemen had broken from their position and up the slope to the attack, and into the muzzle of that machine-rifle in the hands of the 'R Guebait.

From all of that, one image was outstanding: the face and form of Luabala as he had led the freed captives of the 'R Guebait up the inner slope to where he, Bowan, the last of the Legion, groped over a useless machine-gun. These men about him here now were the former captives of the *razzou;* they wore the clothing of the 'R Guebait, possessed their camels and their rifles. It had been victory, after all, then.

Despite the pain, he hitched up a little from against the padded wooden camel saddle which propped his head and shoulders. With a tremendous effort of his will he brought himself to call out. He spoke first in the pidgin French used from Morocco to the Congo, thinking that some of the black men about the fire would understand him and come to him.

Several of them got up, wiped their hands on the tattered *djellabas* of the dead, and strode over across the flinty sand. They stood above him and smiled down. They spoke to him, asking soft questions in a language he had never heard before and could not understand.

He waved a bandaged hand and arm at them in an impatience of weakness and pain. "What's going on? Who's in command here? Where's the lieutenant? Where's Luabala? Luabala!"

The big, black men showed their teeth as they grinned and nodded their heads. They made gestures with their long, fine hands and said further words whose meaning he could not grasp. Then one of them turned, and went away to the other side of the fire at a kind of loping trot. When he returned, Luabala walked beside him, limping, dragging one thickly bandaged leg, his arm hard against the shoulder of the other man. He sat down, right beside Bowan, before he spoke.

"How are you?" he asked then quietly. "Are you coming out of it? They all but got you, back there."

"I know that," Bowan said. "I remember that. But, where are we now, where are we going, with these men?"

LUABALA looked off into the darkness, his eyes seemed to stare for and find something beyond the sight and comprehension of every other man there. "We have come South, and East, from El Hank," he said to Bowan then. "We are all that is left of the men who were there. Your men of the Legion are all gone, and the men of my command went before them. These men here, of the Begra tribe, saw to it

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that there are no more men of the 'R Guebait *razzou* alive.

"All that night, they hunted the last of them across the desert. I was still in operation then; I saw that. I saw too that your *braves* of the Legion got decently buried, away from the jackals, and the men of my company in a similar way. You and I had a little of the luck; we happened to live, and to have these men to bring us here."

"Here?" Bowan asked through lips which were clumsy with his constant pain.

"We are now four days from that water-hole at El Hank," Luabala said. "If my compass is right, we are about three hundred kilometers to the east and a little south of Taoudeni and El Djouf. My original plan, when we left El Hank, was to head for the oasis at Taoudeni; the military escort for the salt caravan comes in there soon. But there are other hostile *razzous* and raiding *harkas* in the desert. We have brushed with three of them since leaving El Hank. And they are all to the west of us."

"Between Taoudeni and Timbuktu then," Bowan said.

"That's right." Luabala was hunching over a big goatskin water bag, tipping it towards the other man in invitation. "If these men here of the Begra were not good warriors, what the 'R Guebait began for us those other *harkas* would have finished."

Bowan looked up slowly from the other's face. He stared at the warriors standing silently behind them. They stood now as though cast immobilely in classic molds. Most of them had slung their captured Mannlichers and Winchesters by the straps about their shoulders. They rested with the slender, iron-tipped 'R Guebait battle lances in their hands, their weight against them. Some of the low firelight wavered over them and their faces, eyes. They were of a fine and tall race of men. And they rested wholly quiet and expressionless beneath his long, minute scrutiny.

From his knowledge of the black colonial regiments drawn from Senegal and Gambia and Dahomey, he tried to place these men. But there was none of the innately sullen and forever savage quality of the Senegalese or other West Coast tribes about them. Their lips also were not thickly negroid, or the noses wide-spread and short, the brows not sloping quickly up into the conically shaped skulls general among the West Coast peoples in the French territories.

These men had the same facial mold and bodily structure of Luabala himself. "Who," Bowan asked Luabala slowly, "are these men, the Begra?"

LUABALA gave him a smile; in that instant, the big *tirailleur's* dark, strongly boned face was strangely brightened. "They are of my people," he said. "Of my own tribe. We, the Begra, come from beyond the Congo. And never before have the Beraber, or the Arabs, or any other men, put their hands upon us and brought us into chains and captivity. That is one reason they fought so well, at El Hank, even in their chains. That is why they are so happy now, and so grateful to you and me."

Bowan rested back for a moment against the padded high arch of the camel saddle, too wearied and too caught with pain to speak. "You, though," he said after a time to Luabala, his eyes still shut, "say that you are of the same tribe. You are a true Begra?"

Luabala gave off laughter which had

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in it the notes of gay music. "Yes. That may seem strange to you, who have known me and heard of me for a long time in the colonial regiments and in France, but it is entirely the truth. My father was the chief of the Begra tribe—but that is not the word—he was the king. And his father's father and his father before him. I am the son of kings.

"But we of the Begra have always been faced with another tribe, the Simogay.

"They are our blood enemies and our neighbors.

"Forever, beyond the known history of the two tribes, the Begra and the Simogay have fought and hated each other. My father was killed in a battle with the Simogay, when I was a little boy. I was too young, by many years, and one of my uncles was made head of the tribe. But my mother was glad for that, she was extremely thankful. My mother was a very intelligent woman, and, years before, she had talked for many hours with the one white man who had ever penetrated the Begra or Simogay country.

"That man was a White Father, a French Dominican monk. So, after my father's death, my mother left the tribe; she remembered what the Father had told her about the greatness of the French and the greatness of all people who worshipped a man named Jesus Christ. She took me down the Congo to the French and to Christianity."

Luabala halted his deep and richly vibrant voice; he looked over at Bowan, now staring at him and sitting erect, and laughed. "That fact is well known among old French colonials in Dakar and Agadir—even to a few people in Paris. But the majority of people who know me think I am from one of the coastal tribes, a son of an Ouloff chief, or from one of the Dahomey clans. One African tribe is very much the same as the next to most Frenchmen, and none count for much in Paris and on the Continent.

"And then of course, for years now, ever since I knew you at St. Cyr, I have been an officer in the Senegalese *tirailleur* regiments, and I speak Ouloff and all the other dialects with absolute fluency. But, you have questions, *mon vieux?*"

Bowan shrugged his unwounded shoulder tenderly and smiled. "Only the common ones, of curiosity," he said. "After all, you and I were in the same class at St. Cyr, and we both used to play tennis at the same club. But what happened to your mother, after she brought you down the Congo?"

LUABALA looked down at his slashed and chafed boots. He seemed to study them for a long time. "She died," he said then in a very low and slow voice, "far from her people, but very happily, and deep in the heart of the Christian religion. But that was years ago, long after I had gone out to school in France. Now, I know, you will ask about me, so I will tell you briefly.

"I knew only of my own people and my own heritage vaguely, from small boyhood memories, and my mother's never very nostalgic stories. I believe, though, that I was born to be a soldier. And from the moment I entered the gates at St. Cyr I was certain of it. My people have always been warriors; in my tribe, the pursuit of war is a man's only honorable profession. As long as I fought, and fought well, I was happy. Just as you," he was again smiling. "John Bowan . . ."

"John Duncan Gracie Bowan,"

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Bowan said. "That's a Scottish name, every bit of it. I am a Scot, by blood. My people came out to France from Scotland with Bonnie Prince Charlie. We fought for him, and were loyal to him, but when he was dead, we fought for France. We've been doing that ever since—fighting for France—although the family's men have always gone back to Scotland for their women. My folks, too, have always been warriors, and fighting our trade. Scots, by blood, but French, by the sword and by the flag. But, now?"

Luabala stared levelly before him. "Now," he said, "several things. We were sent out from duty at Timbuktu to do a job. We've done that; we've intercepted, stopped and wiped out that 'R Guebait *razzou* and freed whatever prisoners it possessed.

"Our orders then were, as I understand them, to return immediately to our base at Timbuktu with the men under our command and whatever prisoners and slaves we had taken. But we are the sole survivors of our commands. No prisoners were taken. These men here are no longer captives bound for slavery. And, further, our orders were to return if possible any prisoners of the 'R Guebait to their own tribes and territory. Those things are correct?"

"Those things are correct," Bowan said in a hushed, quick voice. "But our course here is far from Timbuktu or towards contact with any French military *poste* or group. We are now practically half way between Taoudeni and Lake Tchad. There is nothing directly south of us except the last of the desert and the Sudan."

"And then," broke in Luabala quietly, "the Congo."

"Yes." Bowan's light gray eyes flared rapidly up. "And then the Congo. But you and I can't go to the Congo, Luabala."

"LISTEN," Luabala said in his perfect, flowing French. "Do allow me . . . You are wounded, and quite seriously—that I know. It is I who have been dressing your wounds. I, too, got quite carved up in that action at El Hank, and I got a slug through my thigh the other day back here when we brushed with one of these other raiding parties now to the west.

"Neither of us can ride a camel alone. Neither of us is capable of traversing the desert between here and Tchad, or the column moving towards Taoudeni, or any other established *poste*. These men, the Begra, are going south to where they were captured and came from, beyond the Congo. They have arms, all of our French equipment except the machine-rifles and the Saint Étienne gun, for which there was no more ammunition and which I wrecked myself before we left El Hank—and also the rifles of the 'R Guebait. Now, they know how to use those pieces. In the last few days, I've shown them. When the 'R Guebait took them, they were fighting only with spears.

"They are fine warriors—excellent soldiers in almost any sense, and compose a force strong enough to withstand in a running fight any hostile raiders we might meet between here and the Sudan. We cannot keep them from going on south; there is no reason that we should. Our orders, actually, were to do so if we found that expedient. And as I see it, it is extremely logical for us, wounded and practically helpless individually as we are, to go on with them.

"We can leave them at the Congo, or before we reach the Congo, when

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our wounds are healed and we can travel alone, or make contact with some French *poste* or forces. Otherwise, we are just wilfully and almost suicidally throwing our lives away. What do you think, frankly?"

Bowan replied: "I'm still an officer of the Legion and the French Colonial Army. And so are you. Neither of us was shipped to the *poste* at Timbuktu for our health, or for our personal fun. The skipper back there has now no idea at all of what happened to us, our column or the 'R Guebait. One of us has got to get back there, or to the nearest *poste* around Lake Tchad. Word has got to be sent back somehow, suicide or not."

Luabala turned upon him once more that magnificently glowing smile. He said, "You, *mon Lieutenant*, are still too close to death to speak well of suicide. But this, which I will tell you now, is possible, if our own return from here is not. These men follow me now; they are my men. They"—his voice quite perceptibly widened, richened—"call me their king. Any one of them is willing to carry a message you or I will write to Timbuktu, right into the hands of the *commandant*.

"The camels the 'R Guebait left us are not the best beasts, or in the best condition. But one healthy, brave and intelligent man, well-armed and riding alone, can with absolute certainty reach the *poste*. The raiding parties now in the desert are not after one man, one camel and one rifle; they seek much larger loot. They would not even follow one fast-riding man's tracks. So you will write this note, for you and me, to the *commandant* at Timbuktu?"

Bowan did not answer for several instants, and did not look at Luabala. But he could hear that man talk in easy gutturals with the Begra warriors, then footsteps off through the sand, and their return. He looked up to see Luabala holding a sweat-stained little notebook and pencil out to him. "Your own," Luabala said. "We found it in your saddle-bag."

Bowan frowned, then cursed, then laughed aloud. "You have a lot of answers," he said roughly. "More than you ever told the *commandant*. But, when are you planning to leave here?"

"Several hours before dawn," Luabala said. He gave a quick glance at the starry sky. "As soon as possible."

"You're in a hurry, aren't you?" Bowan grunted, his head bent as he pushed the pencil stiffly across the rumpled pages.

"Yes," Luabala said. He was getting to his feet, unaided. "I return to my own people, and my own country. I am very eager to see both."

CHAPTER III.

TRIBAL WAR.

BOWAN'S recording of those next days was a vague one. They were seen by him through the opaque veil of his pain and exhaustion. He knew that the party of men of which he was a member travelled always south swiftly and steadily. He also was aware that for a span of days Luabala was likewise not a leading member of the group, but lurched through the heat of the days as he, Bowan, did, in a rough sort of litter swung between two camels, and at night was fed and tended to by the Begra warriors about the scanty campfires before once more they moved on again.

It was several weeks, calculated

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Bowan, before Luabala himself was well enough to be free of his litter and to ride astride one of the thin-necked mounts captured from the 'R Guebait. But from then on Luabala led the party; he was its sole chief and head. The other men obeyed him instantly and implicitly. Several times, almost ironically, Bowan pondered Luabala's words of the one night he had talked to him, when he had written the note long since despatched to the commandant at Timbuktu: these men, the Begra, looked upon Luabala as their natural chieftain and the king of their tribe. Now, they and he were returning to what was his inherited kingdom.

This now was becoming more and more a signal march of triumph. The last of the great desert had been left behind in days and half nights of steady riding. The scrub borders of the Sudan had been penetrated and passed. The party had gone on, into lush and immense jungle. One night, before a mud-walled little town whose name Bowan never knew, men who wore the dress and spoke the sharp dialect of Northern Arabs came out and dealt with Luabala. They bowed before him, and punctiliously called the beneficence of Allah down upon him; they brought him small but worthy gifts of food and wine, and bought the camels of the 'R Guebait for the price he named. They treated him also, thought Bowan through the flushed, hot waves of his fever, as a king.

Two days afterwards, the party came to a river, one of the headwater affluences of the Niger, or a branch of the Congo; just which, Bowan was never sure. But men were waiting there, black and obsequiously competent men; also a broad, heavy dugout boat with a thatched sort of structure in the stern where Luabala carried Bowan alone. "You will be better now," he said to Bowan. "No more jolting and banging in litters in the sun. This will all be smooth and easy. I have quinine for you now; I got it from those Arabs, back there. I have been giving it to you, but now you can dose yourself. We will be in my country, my home, soon. You must be well then, absolutely. There are many things to do there."

"What things?" Bowan asked him thickly, trying to sit up a bit from the kind of pallet of palm fibre he rested upon.

Luabala smiled at him, standing bent at the low opening of the shelter. "If I were to tell you that," he said, "I would keep you awake all tonight, and all tomorrow night. And you must get to sleep. Bunk-duty, soldier!"

For Bowan that river was like part of a dream. He had never before seen anything like it. Great flowers and festoons of leaves and creepers which had all the colorations and formations of flowers hung out over and dragged against the golden-ribbed, murmurously beautiful river.

LUABALA'S admonition and hope were recognized: Bowan got well along the river. His wounds healed, strength came back into his veins and muscles, the dregs of the fever went from him, and he ate greatly, slept less, and brought the skill of his eyes and hand back, made certain of his restored strength, standing at the bow with the warriors and Luabala, a fishing spear in his hand, laughing gayly aloud as he impaled his quarry with the needle-pointed bamboo rod, flipped it spinning to the bottom of the boat.

Then more serious concerns and thoughts came upon all of them. So

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far, they had passed no other craft or seen no other man along the river. Now, though, drums which had notes like far, dimmed thunder beat back in the jungle, and the Begra carried their rifles with them when they went to fish in the bow, a shield of green logs was built about the steersman in the stern, and the dugout boat was no longer made fast alongside the bank at night, the boatsmen dropping a crude rock anchor in midstream instead.

"We are coming into the Simogay country," Luabala told Bowan quietly. "We must pass through part of it to reach my country. They have dealings with the Arab traders to the North, and these men here tell me that it was by a Simogay ruse, and Simogay help, that they were trapped and captured by the 'R Guebait.

"It will be war, *mon ami,* when I return to my country."

"Why not here?" Bowan asked. "In their own country, while you're passing through it in such a small group?" Out of years of inflexible habit, he had been cleaning and oiling his Colt .45 automatic, examining the cartridges in the clip and the action of the clip itself. "You tell me, now, that these Simogay gents, who you say are your blood enemies, have steady dealings with the Arabs up North. But still you bartered with Arabs at that town we passed; they even came out and bought the camels, and had a chance to see or guess at every rifle and round of ammunition we've got here."

Luabala let go a little, soft shout of laughter. "Good questions," he said. "But I think I have good answers for them. The Simogays are a poor people, much poorer than we of the Begra. Their men hunt the lion, and the elephant, and the crocodile and what you call the hippopotamus. But they are content to call themselves warriors, and not hunters. It is their women who tend the cattle and the maize patches, and keep the tribe alive. The Simogay men have not enough of worth to barter with the Arabs for more than the worst old lead-pipe rifles, the muzzle-loader *moukhalas* that were made up in Marrakech fifty years ago.

"They still are forced to fight with those, and with the spear and bow. As my people are too, I admit—or will be, until I arrive with these guns, which fortune has put in my hands. . . . But, you have asked me why I traded with those Arabs back there, in the Sudan? Because I want to know those men; I hope, in my turn, to account for each one of them, and all like them.

"And, more, I knew that through them news would be brought back to the Simogay that we would pass this way, along the river, but armed so that no Simogay war party would be pleased to try an ambush on us here, day or night. You understand, Lieutenant?"

"I understand very damn' well," Bowan said. "And also that very soon you plan to treat me to a little backwoods war."

FOR a moment, the expression of Luabala's eyes became somber, nearly savage. "It may not be so small," he said. "That I cannot tell now, and will not be able to until I have talked with my people. But, will you help me in that war, Legionnaire?"

"That's it," Bowan said, the lines of his mouth wryly drawn as he spoke. "I'm still an officer in the Legion; you're still an officer of a *tirailleur* regiment, no matter whether or not both our former commands have been absolutely destroyed. As I understand it, this is French mandated territory, even way back in here, although, of

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course, little or nothing has ever been done about it."

"Mostly nothing," said Luabala swiftly. "No man has ever been brought to rule successfully over the Begra, or the Simogay and some of the other tribes here either, for that matter. As I once told you, the Dominican who converted my mother to Christianity was the only white man to ever move through this territory, and to come forth alive to tell of it.

"On the military maps in Paris and Rabat this is French mandated territory, yes; but never in reality or anything like it."

"Pretty much the heart of the Dark Continent," Bowan said in a slow, consciously quiet voice.

"As much as any man can ever get to it," Luabala answered. "But you seem to have doubts of this war I plan. Why?"

Bowan spoke, laughing shortly. "For just those reasons I expressed tacitly before: this is French territory, supposed to operate under French territorial rule; the people here are supposed to live in peace and maintain the peace. If there is war here, the French are supposed to know of it, control, commence or end it. You know all that."

"I know all that; yes," Luabala said. "But there have been wars here since long before the coming of the French into Equatorial Africa, and ever afterward, and so far they have never been the direct concern, or even within the direct knowledge, of the French administrators. You grant me that?"

Bowan slightly smiled. "In the face of it, I have to."

LUABALA lifted and spread forth a hand; he directed it off into the darkness across the mellifluous river and towards the massed walls of the jungle beyond. "Fate," he said, "first our military duties, then circumstance in several forms and necessities, brought us here, you and me, together. Look back; remember. You and I and our outfits were sent out from far in the North, from Timbuktu, to stop a raiding party whose only reason for passing through our military zone was the capturing of slaves here.

"If, now, you and I and my people of the Begra conquer or destroy the Simogay, we immediately do away with a lot of the root cause which cost the French government a Legion section and a marching company of *tirailleurs* at the cliffs of El Hank. But it was your military duty, your obligation to the flag you serve, to sacrifice your men there when the necessity manifested itself.

"What I must ask you now is, will it be any less your military duty and purpose to aid me and my people in a war of a punitive type against the Simogay?"

Bowan thought long before he answered. He watched the fireflies on the river. He listened to the insect and sleepy bird and monkey sounds in the jungle, the turning and turgid splash of a hippopotamus in the shallows of a sand-bar far below. "No," he said at last. He was very grave. "You're right. I'll help you in your war against the Simogay. If only primarily, you and these men saved my life, and wiped out our mutual debt to the 'R Guebait, where the Legion and the *tirailleurs* had already failed . . ."

Luabala stood, straightening to his full height, and Bowan stood with him. Luabala's eyes flashed in the dark; his lips were drawn back; a slow and very dim trembling was running through his body. "You are doing right," he said in a voice which was

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resonant even in its softness. "You are willing to gamble with me. . . . You are following the road Joffre took, and Gallieni and Lyautey. They found it here, and in Cochin-China, Madagascar, Morocco . . . The glory road. . . ."

Luabala had his hand out to him, and, slowly, Bowan took it. It was vibrant, nearly crushing in its power and tensity. But Bowan's eyes were hooded, solemnly staring, as he answered. "Yes," he said. "That might be the glory road. But that's often a tough, and bitter, and treacherous way. . . . I've seen too many men already who've tried to follow it, Luabala."

"*Zut!*" Luabala said to him. "Don't be silly! You're one of them now; you've just admitted to it. And, day after tomorrow, we'll reach my village. Two days after that, we should be starting for our war. . . . Laugh, lieutenant of the Legion! Think of your citations and honors when this is over, and the news is back to Paris!"

"I'll laugh," said Bowan mildly, "and I'll think of all the rest, when this war is over. . . . Now, I'm going to get some sleep. Good night, chap, and good luck."

"I already have the luck," Luabala said. He spoke the word with his head back, his eyes wide, staring up at the distant, thin panelling of the stars above and reaching of the jungle walls. "All I want now is men—more men like you—and then all the glory!"

Where he lay already on his sleeping pallet in the stern, Bowan lifted his head a bit to answer him, then thought better of it, lowered back, and shut his eyes. "It's no use," he said silently, "saying more to him now." You must just wait, wait for the days, and for the turning of the way which Luabala, in his great strength and his magnificent confidence, called the glory road. The days, thought Bowan, slipping into sleep—only the days could tell.

CHAPTER IV.

DRUMS OF WAR.

THE place where Luabala had been born and still so proudly called home, the principal village of the Begra tribe, was high on a bluff around which the river curved closely on three sides. It was entered only by one path, which rose up steeply from the flat lands on the fourth side, cleared for generations of the jungle vegetation and given over to the cultivation of the maize and yam patches of the women.

A stockade of ironwood logs, yards through in thickness and feet higher than the head of a bull elephant, guarded that patch and the gate which ended it. There, watch-towers which were constantly manned by bowmen and lookouts, rose up, commanding the entire open land below and the fringes of the jungle leading to it.

Luabala and Bowan climbed the path side by side. Above, the massive gate was raised, and warriors jammed the watch-tower platforms. Behind, the men who had been the prisoners and then the conquerors of the 'R Guebait strode, single file, carrying in their arms and balanced upon their shoulders and their heads the rifles, the scabbarded bayonets and the ammunition cases of the 'R Guebait, the Legion and the *tirailleurs*. Those men walked with their heads high, their feet light; at last, they were returning to their village, and as conquerors.

Before them, a yard or so in advance, Bowan and Luabala moved in complete silence. Nothing had been said between them since they had left

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the battered dugout boat in the river, to be carried ashore through the shallows upon the shoulders of the warriors, and then Bowan had simply said, " I'm glad you're back, Luabala."

It was his sharp knowledge now, though, that Luabala no longer wore any part or identifying garment of his uniform as a French officer. In the fighting before the cliffs at El Hank, he had lost his tunic and his black and gold *kepi;* in the weeks of journeying since then he had sadly worn his boots and riding breeches, discarded the boots days back. Yesterday, he had flung the breeches after the boots, and, in the fashion of the Begra warriors, ripped a piece from an old 'R Guebait *djellaba* and made himself a brief, tight breechclout about his loins.

But he carried strapped about his waist his service pistol in its darkened leather holster, and in his right hand the Winchester rifle which had been the prized possession of the leader of the 'R Guebait *razzou,* a weapon which had been excellently cared for, the stock and grip filigreed in silver and gold.

Beside him, quite suddenly and startlingly, Bowan had the brief thought that he walked here nearly as a captive, or the hostage chieftain of some other and strange tribe. He wore his uniform still, his stained and cracked *kepi,* his boots and khaki tunic and whipcord breeches of a lieutenant of the Legion. These were clothes these staring men and women and children ahead had never seen before, and looked upon now with a sort of sullenly amused amazement.

A group of senior warriors of the village and tribe emerged out of the gate. They stood immobile there, a pace or so from it. They wore robes made of the skins of male lions; tufts of lions' manes were fixed high in their grease-thick hair. Small, polished shafts of elephant ivory were through the nostrils of their noses and the lobes of their ears. Bright daubs of white and ochre clay were upon their chests, cheeks and torsos. They stood straightly, and quiet, their dark eyes brooding and wide. But the man who had led them from the gate and now stood two paces ahead carried no weapon, and wore no such warrior's attire.

HE was small, and bent, and very old. His eyes were nearly shut in the caverned sockets of his gauntly drawn face. The closely curling hair was white and short upon his finely shaped skull. His clothing was that of a cheap white cotton breechclout, and there were no tribal designs of a warrior upon his face or body. Only, in his right hand, lifted up now, and across his chest and heart, he carried a small, light and intricately carved baton of ebony, and, as Luabala, stepping forth a pace beyond Bowan, came close to him, he held that baton out, and spoke.

What he said, Bowan did not clearly hear or understand. In the last few days of his recuperation and recovery, in the dugout boat with the Begra men, and talking with Luabala, he had begun to pick up a little of the tribal dialect. But the old man spoke now with great swiftness, and with his first words, and the grasping of the baton from his hand by Luabala, an immense war trumpet, made of an elephant's tusk, brayed from the watch-tower above. Instantly, from within the stockade and from the main compound of the village, other trumpets answered, then what sounded like small reed flutes, and some sort of bagpipes, a score of drums.

The drums surfed out everything

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else. They beat away the sonorous and richly pronounced words the old man said. They roared in over the yelling, the screaming and the clapping of the warriors, the young and old men, the women and the children. They filled the quick jungle dusk and the wide reaches of the river with their sound. Then Luabala lifted his hand, the hand which held the carved baton, and the drums, the trumpets, the fifes and pipes were still. He turned, and spoke with Bowan.

"They are welcoming me," he said. "And they are also welcoming you. They have heard about you, from the runners I sent away from the dugout boat two days ago. This," he held the baton up in his immense and tightly gripping hand, "is their sign to me, the sign of my kingship. The man before me is Oualal; he is the witch-doctor of the tribe. Since my uncle's death, he has just told me, he has ruled here as temporary chieftain, a sort of regent. But, he has said, always he, and all the tribe, have been confident of my return. But, let's go in; they're waiting for us, and they have waited a long time. Tell me, though, how do you like the Begra drums?"

"They sound like war drums," Bowan said, looking aside at him in a quick, sharp glance.

"They are war drums," Luabala said. "As I have told you, soon as we are ready, and can get the tribe ready, we will go to war!"

BOWAN was never to forget that first night in the village of the Begra, or the days there following it, before he went with Luabala and his tribe to war. That night was the richest and the most fantastic of his always adventurous and never dull life. With Luabala still side by side, he walked in through the gate to the village, and into a life he had only vaguely imagined.

Immense fires in which roasted whole oxen and bullocks lined their way between the regular rows of huts. The huts were tall, and solidly made, of a type Bowan had not ever seen before in Africa. The walls and roofs were neatly tapered and finished. These were painted and decorated in many colors and designs. In borders along the eaves ran entire series of murals, done in bas-relief in the clay. They depicted scenes of martial triumphs and outstanding events in the life of the tribe. Lion, tiger, elephant and hippopotamus were modelled with a grotesque fidelity there, in scenes of the hunt. Others showed men mounted on horseback, and dressed in armor, bearing shields, lances and swords of a European type, engaged furiously with men who fought only with the *assegai* and bow, and were undoubtedly the Begra.

Bowan spoke of that after a time, when he and Luabala had been seated in the center of the wide main compound under an immense cottonwood tree which faced the *obi*-house and behind which was the largest and most finely built house, the residence of the king. The seating here had been a ceremony in itself. A row of chairs, canopied overhead with striped awnings whose age and origin Bowan never learned, were arranged before the house which had been Luabala's father's and now was to be his own. Those chairs were made of mahogany and all sorts of precious hardwoods, beautifully carved. But the central one, up on a small dais, was made of the tusks of a bull elephant, had a seat contrived of the hide of a hippopotamus, and across the back was flung a lion skin.

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Accompanied by Bowan, by the witch-doctor, Oualal, and all the tribe, Luabala went to sit there. He stopped at the foot of the dais, though, and indicated that another chair be brought and placed beside that of elephant tusks. "For you," he said to Bowan. "You are more than my friend. You are the man who fought beside me, and helped free the warriors we brought back to the tribe. And these people here already know that you will go with us, as a joint leader with me, to fight against the Simogay."

Bowan jerked his lean head, indicating the bold bas-relief designs of the walls splashed high in firelight. "All your history is of war and arms, isn't it? What do those represent, the figures of the men in armor, mounted upon horses and carrying European-style lances and swords?"

LUABALA had waited for the chair for Bowan to be brought and put beside his own on the dais, sat now, drawing the lion skin up about his shoulders. "Those are centuries old," he said. "The tribal artists just repeat them, in absolute detail, when a new house is built or an old one repaired. It is like the Cambodian sort of thing, or the Chinese. But the tribal story is that those horse-mounted men are some that came down across the desert centuries ago.

"Maybe the Crusaders, some wandering far from the battles with the Saracens, or perhaps the Touareg, who ride horses and carry shields and lances like that, and have been known to still possess old chain mail like that made during the crusades in Toledo and Milan.

"You see, the Begra were a much greater people then. We were a part of one of the biggest and most powerful nations on earth, the confederated negro nation of the Songhai. The Songhai ruled for centuries, and had a territory greater than all colonial France now in Africa.

"The word of the Songhai emperors was implicit from far south of here to the borders of what they now call Tunisia; they ruled the desert, too, and the desert tribes. But all that is not so very long ago, no more than four, five centuries; the Portuguese kings used to make trading treaties of absolute parity with the Songhai. Who knows; that might arrive again some day, a nation like that."

Bowan nodded, slowly, stiffly. "No one knows," he said. "Only your glory road can tell you that, Luabala . . ." Then he sat there in silence, watching the tribe come forward, Oualal, then the senior warriors, then all the tribe to the oldest man and woman and the smallest child, to greet individually the man beside him.

They kissed Luabala's hands, and his feet, the black ebony baton held; they each one brought him gifts, of weapons, of food, of treasured personal possessions. They left him crawling backwards on their stomachs, saying his name repeatedly. Then, yards from him, they sprang to their feet and went to the fires and the big dancing drums.

As the last one was through, the drummers crouched and bent their knees and began softly to play, the notes rippling and deepening. "Tonight we dance the war dance," Luabala said to him. "This is the last of that sort of thing, though; no more feasting and celebration until we return from war. Tomorrow, we start preparing for war. You have ideas about that?"

Bowan laughed quietly, watching the tall, handsome men and women dancing

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and eating about the fires. "You're the king here," he said. "It's your army. I'm only a guest here—perhaps almost an unwanted one. . . ."

Luabala turned in the chair of elephant tusks and gave him a long and level gaze. "You are my friend," he said; "let me repeat that. And you are a fine soldier. We are proud and happy to have you here. But, we were talking of war. You remember, at El Hank, how the Senegalese broke, and charged, into the face of concentrated fire, with nothing but their knives. My people fight like that."

His lips moved, and, for an instant, Bowan thought he was going to smile, but he did not. "We are also a black people, and a primitive one. You and I, though, brought South with us more than two hundred and fifty rifles and practically three thousand rounds of ammunition. Some of those pieces, the Lebels, are equipped with bayonets. How would it be if I were to ask you to take those guns, all of them, and the youngest and the quickest of my warriors, the men not yet too fixed in the tradition of the wild, open *assegai* charge, and make a corps, a detachment of shock troops of them? While I shall lead the older, more experienced warriors in the scouting and skirmishing work which will precede all your more formal evolutions as a consolidated, far more efficiently armed group?"

BOWAN replied, "That would be swell. But, they would listen to me, and obey me? You think I can learn the language and then bayonet and rifle manipulation, before you push off on your little joy junket?"

Luabala's wide eyes were narrowed; he was sitting forward in his chair and gazing out at his warriors. "They will learn," he said. "They will be ready when and how we want them. . . . And there is no need for you to learn the Begra dialect. Tonight, I myself will begin; I will choose the men who will be your company, section and squad leaders; I will teach them French—all that they will need to understand and obey you, here, and later.

"It is time, too, some of the warriors here knew a little of the French and their ways; this world here from now on is not going to be as small as they have believed it. Come on now; let's eat. Oualal and the elders are waiting for us. Have you ever tried good palm rum?"

They were getting down from the dais together, and Bowan straightened up to his full height, feeling again the eyes of the warriors and the tribe upon him. "No," he said, grinning, "I never have. But tonight seems like a damn' fine time to begin. It's years since I put a body of men through the school of the soldier."

Luabala was also looking about him with intent eyes. "You could find worse material," he said.

"I was just telling myself that," Bowan told him quietly. "Where's that rum?"

CHAPTER V.

ATTACK.

THEY marched to war against the Simogay with over five hundred warriors strong. Luabala went carrying an *assegai* in his hand, a long bow and arrow case slung from his shoulders—even his automatic pistol left behind him. He led the entire force, it was his to command, but in a separate unit, marching marvellously well in regular strides after their five

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days and nights of intensive drilling, the two hundred youths who composed John Bowan's rank and file swung in a separate, solid column of fours.

They carried the dark Lebel rifles of the Legion and the *tirailleurs;* they carried slung about their naked, lean girths French cartridge belts and bayonets. Bowan strode before them as before any company, his senior lieutenant, a giant youth of eighteen who was Luabala's cousin.

It was Bowan's sensation for a moment, swinging along there, the familiar thud and equipment clatter of marching fighting men at his back, his worn and battered *kepi* cocked on the side of his skull, his belts tight at his waist and shoulder, his automatic swaying at his hip, that he was once more returned to the corps and to the regiments whose fate and glories he had followed for so many years, the organization the French government, often with pride, called its Foreign Legion. But then from the walls and the watch-towers of the village behind, the old men left there blew deeply upon the immense trumpets of elephant tusks, and before him, already sliding off into the first shadows and thick verdure of the jungle, he saw Luabala and the other warriors, catlike, silent, utterly primeval and savage men. Muscles knotted at his jaws; he spoke aloud to himself. "What the hell are you really doing here, donkey?" he asked. Then he laughed at his own question. He turned in his stride, staring back at his company, black and savage men, the brothers, cousins, tribesmen of those now sliding animal-like through the jungle. "Close up! Close up!" he barked. "Watch your files there, corporals! Follow me!"

The final battle with the Simogay began before their principal village, and ended in it. But, in the days and the nights which preceded it, they and their foes of the Begra fought a campaign of jungle ambush, hand-to-hand combat between scouts and isolated groups, such as Bowan had not seen paralleled for their savagery, even during his tours of combat duty with the mobile columns which subdued with stubborn relentlessness the hostile *Chleuh* tribes of the High Atlas in Morocco. No prisoners, he learned, not exceptionally surprised, were taken on either side, and the word "pity" was in no sense included in the lexicon of the warriors of the Simogay or Begra tribe. Men simply met, fought, and the winner, if he was lucky, lived.

But Bowan saw little of that preceding action, was seldom in it. Luabala and the men whom he personally commanded waged and won those engagements. From the second night forward, while still in their own territory, the lank, tall Begra warriors who handled the *assegai* and the bow made contact with and fiercely slaughtered the Simogay. For the Begra had made no secret of their coming; Luabala admitted so to Bowan the first night out from the home village.

Simogay scouts or hunters easily had been able to hear the hammering of the Begra war drums, and already knew of course of the return of the new Begra king to his tribe. And the Simogay were confident, cocky; the last time a raiding party of the Begra had entered their territory, they had been ambushed and captured alive like animals in a snare, sold in chains to the Arab slave-runners from the North. "And they will believe," finished Luabala, talking to Bowan in a harsh, hard voice, "that they will be able to rout and slaughter the Begra again—until the last warrior,

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woman and half-grown boy of their tribe is dead. They are a stupid, if a brave people, the Simogay . . ."

THOSE words re-entered and echoed through Bowan's head the dawn of the final battle with the Simogay. He lay in the center of his deployed company and in the center of the wide, thinly scattered line of all the remaining warriors of the Begra. The Simogay village was situated in the middle of a sort of natural savannah. It lay upon a small slope, stockaded on all sides, with the vast jungle reaches beyond at all four compass points. Yellow elephant grass, nearly as tall as a man's head and quite as inflammable as tinder now in the dry season, grew in the savannah.

"*Hsst, caid!*" It was the young man, Luabala's cousin, whom Bowan had charged as his senior lieutenant, who called. "I would stay down; they have archers concealed in all those *boma* and thorn trees, *caid*. That is an old trick of theirs when we have attacked this place before. . . ."

Bowan smiled, an impulse for laughter broke up through the rigidity of his anger; this boy here had never seen action before in his life, had never before been in Simogay territory, by his own admission of days ago, yet he knew every detail of this terrain, and every probable detail of the Simogay defense and possible counter-attack. . . . "I wonder only, Roddo," he said in slow French so that the boy would understand, "about the time for attack. The sun is up now, and their archers will be able to see us clearly."

Roddo nodded his head in grave agreement. He stared along the line of the men of their company, most of them prostrate in the waving grass, their Lebels, bayonet-affixed at Bowan's recent command, carefully propped up before them, their cartridge pouches hitched around. "They are very nervous, *caid*," Roddo answered. "But it is my cousin's order to wait, is it not, for the others to go first?"

"SO," Bowan said. "That is *Ras* Luabala's order." He looked back at Roddo, smiling in sympathy and understanding. "I know; you and these others who serve me are all young men; you have not yet got your warrior's glory or even your warrior's first wounds, or a chance at them. *Ras* Luabala has held us out of nearly all the action so far; he has told us to wait. But, he commands us, and he is a very fine warrior; that I know by observation."

Roddo allowed nerves to twitch at the jaws of his thin, striking face. "But the habit of waiting in war is not a great one among the Begra, *caid*. I can only tell you that if we are held much longer without action here, these youths—"

"That is your job, and my job, to see that they do not do anything like that," Bowan broke in quietly. "But look over there; there is your answer. Your cousin, the *Ras*, has been waiting for this—the morning breeze; he is setting the grass on fire, and we will charge in behind it."

The dry grass caught quickly in the easy pulse of the breeze down over the jungle roof. It smoked, crackled, spread and then ran redly, licking forward, and in the stockade of the Simogay a conch-shell wailed once in warning and drums beat violently.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

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Sin-Swept Sea

By H. H. MATTESON

They fought like mad Kodiak bears

A spoiled girl, thirty thousand missing dollars, a vanished island—and the curtain was ready to go up on that Aleutian drama

THIS wireless message comes to us from Seattle out into the Aleutian Islands, and it says Kizzy Lorne had ran over a man, and was in jail, without bail, and just had to have fifteen hundred dollars. Tip Mallory, the big red-headed boy that had come over from Squaw Duck to get

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the message, stands there wringing his hands helpless.

"Now, here is the situation," says the commissioner to Tip. "Hiyu Lorne has willed that asbestos island to you, Tip, the one that sunk with you two onto it, like islands does up here in the Aleutians. If the island comes back, it's your'n. Similar, Hiyu Lorne has appointed you guardeen of his girl, Kizzy, till she comes of age a year from now. And Hiyu has willed her the zinc box with thirty thousand dollars in it. Hiyu is a terrible sick man, made so, in part anyway, by knowing how wild his girl has got of late. He's too sick to be told about this message from Kizzy. Under all considerations, I think it all right, Tip, you Kizzy's guardeen, to go back to Squaw Duck, and, watching your chances, you take fifteen hundred out of the zinc box, slide it back under the bed, wire that money to the girl, and say nothing about it till Hiyu is better."

Tip he looks terrible relieved, and he goes out prompt, climbs into his skin boat and paddles away. When next we see Tip, he tells us as follers:

"I paddled back frantic. Tolo, my pet fox, he run to meet me on the beach. Tolo is terrible smart, and he knows things humans don't, and he give us warning before the island is sunk by that doleful wailing, and when I get back, he's giving that danger yelp of his again, and I go up nervous to the *barabara,* and Hiyu is laying on the floor, muttering, 'Find it if you can,' and I look under the bed, and the zinc box and the thirty thousand dollars is gone.

"I lifts Hiyu back onto the bed," Tip goes on, "and he keeps on muttering, 'Find it if you can,' and he kind of groans, and—dies.

"For the first I notes Hiyu has his carpet slippers on, and they're wet. With Tolo showing me, I follered Hiyu's trail, from the *barabara* door to the boat shed, and there was the tar bucket, we use to tar nets, tipped over, and Hiyu's trail led to the water's edge and back to the house.

"And Tolo, he shows another trail, that led to a big beach boulder west, and there's keel scratches to show a skin boat had been dug up, and shoved off again, and then, too late, I remember when I was getting ready to go over to the Thunderbird to get that bad news message from Kizzy, Tolo acted strange. Why, they was some one hiding on the island then, waiting for me to go, so he could squander in and steal the zinc box. Sure.

"Getting some sense at last, I looked around good, and on the kitchen floor was some drops of blood, and Tolo's face and jaw was swole and cut where, when Tolo had nabbed this thief, the thief hit him with a rock, or club, or kicked him, or something. The zinc box and thirty thousand dollars was gone, and Hiyu's last words was to 'Find it if you can,' and he was dead."

WHEN Tip come back over to Thunderbird to arrange Hiyu's funeral, and tell us about the zinc box, he similar bought a money order for every penny he had on earth, thirty-eight dollars and forty cents, and sent it to Kizzy, in the city-county jail in Seattle. A passel of us volunteered to make a coffin and dig the grave, so they wasn't no funeral expense.

"I just don't know what I will do," says Tip, twisting them big, water-butt hands of hissen. "Winter is setting in. They hain't a day's work of no kind to be had. They hain't one chance in a million this asbestos island Hiyu

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wills to me will ever reappear back. I just don't know. Kizzy needs money, needs it bad. I got to get her some money. Just got to."

Tip goes out, and the commissioner and I set there both thinking the same thing. Old Hiyu Lorne had made a fool of this girl, and Tip he aimed to do similar if he could.

Hiyu had sent her away to a boarding school when she was twelve. He never see her again. When Hiyu begin stripping out the asbestos, and ships laying hove to all the time loading, and money rolling in, Hiyu he raised the ante constant of cash he sent that girl.

"Lookit," Hiyu would say proud when the bills come in. "See this here. My girl is paying sixteen dollars a piece for shimmys. Six dollars for socks. Lookit. My girl is doing all her sweating agin silk."

Then Hiyu would laugh boastful and eediotic, and I remembers Kizzy's mother's underwear, which she made 'em of flour sacks, and I seen 'em flapping on the line.

Later when word come to Hiyu that Kizzy had been expelled out of a school, and bigger bills than ever for entertainment come in, showing how Kizzy must of give this last party in a saloon, judging the items, why Hiyu didn't laugh so hearty, or act so smart. But he didn't have the *tumtum* to cut down her allowance, sending her month after month from three hundred to five hundred dollars, and I know, account of I run the post office at Thunderbird.

A little while after this asbestos island sunk so quick, Hiyu and Tip not taking the warning that Tolo tried to give 'em, and they just escaped off in a skin boat and that was all, Hiyu was took down sick. The Coast Guard doctor said it was account Hiyu had strained his heart valves, stripping out fiber, fifteen, even twenty hours a day. But Kizzy's goings on had plenty to do with it, too.

A week or so after Hiyu was buried, they comes letters from Kizzy, and she says she's sorry her father is dead, and that's about all she does say, but she advises us the party she run over is up, and she's out of jail, and she acknowledges information regarding the theft of the zinc box, and she says that's a plenty wild story, and she instructs her guardeen, Tip Mallory, to send her money, and send it prompt.

Kizzy's letter personal to Tip he didn't show us, but we figure it just smoked, and he come over to Thunderbird looking plenty dejected, and he had Tolo with him, and he set in the store smoothing Tolo's ears, and he blurts out final that it was terrible lucky Tolo was the finest silver king anywhere in the North, and he aimed to sell him to a fox farmer for five hundred dollars and send the money to Kizzy.

With that I and the commissioner we lit into him, and we cussed him, and we got eloquent and profane, and we told him how too much *pil chickamin* had been the ruin of Kizzy, and any fool could see it, and we convinced him final not to sell Tolo, which I never saw no one more fonder of a pet.

Well, he just hugged and mauled Tolo when he got persuaded not to sell him, and he raised up to go, saying how he just had to figure some other way to raise money.

He stands there a minute, and we tell him, as he knows, it's the edge of winter, and all the salmon canneries, the fish traps, driver outfits, everything is shut down.

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"I got to figure a way," he says; "and I will."

HE come back over the next day, and we hear him nailing up a placard sign on the front of the store, and a lot of idle hands gather, and they read the sign, and they all laugh terrible hearty, and one party comes sauntering up walking important, and it's this quarter-breed, Moxt Vangrief.

This Vangrief is a terrible good looking, big, dark feller, the women all think, and he wears a astrakhan cap with a list to sta'board, and a long tight coat to show how slim his waist is, and he always has money, but never works, and this Vangrief reads Tip's sign, and he begins to laugh, his way of laughing, just peeling back them thick lips, and showing his teeth, and he begins to sneer.

"Slick work," says Moxt. "Any fool can see through that sign. Here's Tip Mallory letting on he's so poor he has to take in washing, just to cover up that he stole that thirty thousand dollars."

I fetch a observation at the sign, and onto it Tip Mallory says how he's prepared to do all kinds of plain and fancy washing for fish hands and others.

Seems like a lot of hands did send Tip their washing to do account of Tip come in a couple of weeks later, and planks down forty-odd dollars, and says how he wants a money order to send to Kizzy Lorne in Seattle.

"I'm terrible ashamed that hain't more money," Tip says. "I washes constant, all day and into the night, and that's all I been able to make."

Tip he looks very beseeching into our tobacco case, but he don't buy none, and he goes out, and gets into his skin boat.

It was about that same time Moxt Vangrief comes in, and he kind of lays two gold Russian rubles on the shelf, and says how if I was to give him Kizzy Lorne's address in Seattle, he would likely be so pleased he'd go off and forget to pick up the money. I tells him cold that post offices don't give out no addresses, but any letter addressed to Kizzy will be forwarded. With that he licks the flap of a envelope, with her name onto it, drops it, and goes on out.

I got to thinking deep about Tip, and he'd asked me would I domineer at everybody to get 'em to send their washing to him, and I figures I might start by lugging over my own, so I does up a bundle and paddles over.

From the offing I can see this giant of a Tip, that red hair flaming in the sun, and he's playing a very lively tune on the washboard indeed. He grins glad when I come up the slope and he seen my washing bundle, and Tolo he welcomes me too, and Tip takes his hands out of the suds, and says serious he wants to ask me something.

"You've lived in the Aleutians a long time, Kap," he says. "Do you estimate they's chances my asbestos island will ever come popping to the top again?"

"It might," I says. "In the forty years I been here, I seen half a hundred islands sink, and, likely, a half or a quarter of 'em come back up. If Mother Earth gets gas onto her stomach bad, she might belch you back up your island. But maybe not."

"Well, anyway," he says, sliding up his sleeves that had come down, revealing out a pair of arms that looks like legs, and diving back into the tub, "I'm doing very good at the washing.

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I even got a Aleut boy, Simiak, picking up and delivering back laundry for me."

This Simiak, of who Tip had spoke, come into the store a day or so later, and he asks me where he can find Vangrief. I tell him Moxt usually anchors that gray speed craft of hissen in the east end of Sin-Swept Bay.

"I go there very quick," says this Simiak. "Tip he say it to me to find Moxt Vangrief, and see can Tip get Moxt's washing to do. I go."

SOME more days go by uneventful, and then we get a shock. I hear the packet boat whistle in, and I caper out with the mail sacks, and the boat berths, and the plank shoves out, and acrost it comes teetering a girl on terrible high heel little shoes, and slick, slim legs in silk above 'em, and a little hat clinging over her eye, and she is all ways the purtiest girl I seen since I left the Cumberlands, tho' she's wearing more red paint onto her face than a devil dancer.

She comes to a stop, them brown eyes of hern kind of wandering around bewildered, and after her comes the deck hands cargoing her war bags—round bags, and long—and three trunks.

She comes up to me and asks kind of patronizing is they a way she can get over to Squaw Duck.

"Yes," I says. "I can take you. You want all them war bags and duffle to go too?"

"I do," she says, cold. "I've come to stay, not because I want to, but because I have to. I'm Kizzy Lorne. I sold my car, what was left of it, and I came on the money. How soon can we start?"

"Soon as I work the mail," I says.

I fetch around our big *umiak*, and we load all Kizzy's bags and stuff into it, and she gets in, and I wisht I had had a chance to get warning to Tip so he could organize hisself, but I can't, and when we land, Tip, like always now, is making his bows at the washboard.

Kizzy she hurries on up, and I foller with a couple of her war bags, and Tip, thinking it was just me paddling in, account of this *umiak* has a high freeboard, he hain't aware a girl is standing back, regarding at him torture away at a pair of fish slimed tarpaulin pants. He jerks his head around when Tolo comes on the run, and begins to whimper and sniff at the girl.

"I suppose I'm entitled to shelter in this house," she says, very cold. "And something to eat. Thirty thousand dollars ought to buy something for me."

Tip's face and neck just flared scarlet, but he drug his hands out of the tub, and flirted off the suds.

"Sure," he says, beginning to grin kind of, and nodding at Tolo who was muzzling Kizzy's hand, and whining like he approved of her entire.

"Sure," he says, "what *muckamuck* we got is yourn to eat, and a place to roll your blanket. Tolo says so."

In just no time Tip has lugged up her plunder and her trunks, and ensconced her into the two best rooms, and she comes on out of the house and hands me a five dollar bill.

"No," I says, "I and your father was *tillicums*. It hain't our system."

She kind of flushed at that, and says, "I been away so long, I'd forgot. Thanks. *Klahowa, tillicum,*" she said, kind of smiling that she remembered the lingo words for "good-by, friend."

She turns back into the *barabara,* and I get ready to paddle back, but Tip yanks me by the sleeve and says how he's got something to show me.

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We go round back of the shed, and Tolo follers, and Tip opens the door, and he reaches in and he takes out three-four of the ditty bags the hands pack their washing in to send.

"You watch clost," Tip says to me, "and then, when you think it over deep, you tell me what you conclude from same."

Tip lays down them four bundles of washing and he snaps his fingers, and Tolo comes up and begins to sniff the clothes bundles, and to three of them bundles he don't pay no attention, but at the fourth the hair raises on his neck, and he bares his fangs and snaps and snarls vicious.

Tip kind of shoos Tolo away, and slings all the four bundles back into the shed, and shuts the door. "That there bundle at the which Tolo acted so fierce is Moxt Vangrief's washing," he said.

I starts to open and speak, but Tip holds up that terrible big hand of hissen.

"Not now," he says. "Just you ponder at what Tolo done, and then, later, you tell me conclusions."

So I gets into my skin boat and paddles back to the Thunderbird.

IN a day or two Tip he comes over to the store, and I says, "Tip, I conclude up regarding Tolo snarling at that washing just like you do. You can delude humans, but you can't fool a smart king fox like Tolo."

Tip he just nods, and drags out three dollars and lays it on the counter. "I and Tolo, we go along very good on just rock cod," he says. "But Kizzy, she's got to have luxuries."

With that he picks out some green gage plums, and some package pudding stuff, and six papers of cigarettes. He regards longing at a pound tin of Fish Flakes, his brand of smoking, but jerks his head decisive and goes on out.

Again he comes, and buys marmalade, and so forth, but nothing for himself, and I deride at him, but he says it's just divine to have Kizzy in the house, and she's been nurtured delicate, and he aims she shall have luxuries, and he blushes and grins eediotic, and departs.

The commissioner is standing there, and he observes this episode, and I asks him what he deduces from same, and he says, "Why, Tip has gone *hyas tikegh kopa Kizzy.*"

"Yes," I says disgusted, "he's crazy in love with Kizzy Lorne."

The next visit is from Kizzy herself, and the way she come was in this long gray speedboat, riding in the pilot house with Moxt Vangrief. They warped up, and Kizzy come teetering into the store, her lips redder than a gash in a Tyee salmon.

"You and the commissioner, you represent the law here in the islands, don't you?" she asks, kind of patronizing at me with a jerk of her head.

"Yes," I says, "we do. Why?"

"I have been assured that Tip Mallory has my thirty thousand dollars. I want it. I want it now. You are to get it for me."

"Moxt Vangrief is filling you with vicious lies, Kizzy," I says, hot. "This breed is—"

She breaks in on me abrupt to say "—is the only real gentleman I've met since I came to the Aleutian Islands."

My hankering was to turn this girl up and spank her till she just howled. But I see I'd do Tip a lot of harm if I didn't use a lot of tack and diplomacy. "Now, Kizzy," I says, holding in my mad, "they's a important item you don't consider none in estimating this

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Tip Mallory. Why, he wouldn't steal offen you. He'd die for you, shove his hand in the fire—anything. Why, Kizzy, Tip is crazy in love with you. Him steal your money—"

"In love with me," she says, startled and wide eyed. "In love. Do you think so?"

"Emphatic," I says. "I know it. Never in your life will you find any one dog faithfuller, stancher to you than Tip. Go careful, Kizzy, how you let any one put out poison agin Tip Mallory."

She stands there for quite a while, tapping the floor, kind of patting her hands onto her bosom.

"In love with me," she says. "Oh, I can't think that."

But she stepped to the door, opened it, called to Vangrief that she had another way to go home, and thanked him for the ride. Nothing could of resembled meaner, more vicious than the dark face of this breed when he poked his head out of the house and yelled mad at her to come on, he'd have her home in five minutes.

She shook her head, determined, no, shut the door. I watched her clost as she walked around the store, looking into the cases. The hard had gone out of her face complete, and smiles come rippling over it like when a gentle breeze riffles a clean, clear pool.

THE commissioner comes in then, and Kizzy asks me can I take her to Squaw Duck, and I says, tickled, that I can, and I go out to fetch the *umiak* around, and when she comes out, she's got some bundles, and amongst 'em I see a pound tin can of Fish Flakes smoking tobacco, the brand Tip smoked former till he quit.

All the way over to Squaw Duck, she sets with her chin in her hand communing thoughtful. When we hit the beach, she don't wait for me, but hurries on up past where Tip is making that washboard smoke, and she goes on into the house, and just after I get up, and Tolo is jumping onto me, why Kizzy she comes out of the *barabara*.

She's took off them slithery, stick-tight skirts, and them silk socks and teetering shoes, and she's just wearing an amazing pair of flappy little pants that no ways hit to her knees, and barelegged, but for some flat shoes, and a man style shirt open at the neck. She shoves Tip away from the wash-tub, hands him the pound tin of Fish Flakes, and in no time she'd dove them round little arms of hern into the tub, and she made the suds fly very animated.

This Tip, when she hands him that tobacco, and lights into the washing, why he grinned wide sufficient to swaller that tin almost, and he stands there regarding at her the fondest, and just gurgling because Kizzy had fetched him some tobacco, and had turned to to work her shift.

Well, I departed off prompt, figuring talk would run freer betwixt 'em private, and I goes back to the Thunderbird always satisfied that understanding at last was fetching down onto them two.

But I'd kind of been barking at a knot, at that, seemed like. Two-three days later I hears Moxt Vangrief's speed craft roar by, and I fetches a look, and there's Kizzy setting in the pilot house, and her and Vangrief couldn't 'a' been setting closter if they was the Siamese twins.

I turns disgusted to the commissioner, and I says to him that any time he meets up with any one sufficiently capable to foller the vagaries of the female mind, I'd admire to

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have that scientist's photygraft to hang by my bed.

IT'S all ways amazing how far, of a still night, sound will travel here in the Aleutian Islands. This here was one of them ominous still nights, too still. I hadn't heard nothing from Tip for several days, and I'd begun to get uneasy, and consequent of that I was walking the wharf by the store when I should ought to 'a' been in bed.

It's likely half after ten when, as I pace back and forth, that wailing cry, like a spook's whisper, come slithering through the dark, and it come from the direction of Squaw Duck Island.

And twice more I heard that shivery call before I could get to the end of the dock, cast off the painter of a *bidarka,* and climb in. Again and again I heard it, as I paddled on, and then I didn't hear it no more account of all I could hear then was the thunder of the surf outside, and the far overhead squawking of them night flying gulls that always fetch a storm.

I hit the Squaw Duck beach final, in a smother of foam. The *mahtwillie,* as we call it, that vicious in-shore gale from the Bering, was screaming like a thousand cat fights. The wind just spun me dizzy as I went breasting into the gale, and before I could arrive up to the *barabara,* the front door of which was open, and banging violent, Tolo, uttering that wailing wolf cry that I'd heard clear to the Thunderbird, run up and shoved his snout into my hand.

Tolo popped on into the house, and I leaned on the door, and managed to close it.

My hands was purty shaky, but I struck a match, lighted a seal oil lamp that was on the table.

Nobody there. Kizzy's room was kind of in disorder, some clothes kind of slung around careless. When I went back into the living room Tolo was sniffing at the edge of the table, and I picked up a square paper I hadn't seen before:

DEAR TIP:

You've got to do exactly as I say. I know now that you have the zinc box. Bring it, without fail, at eight bells, midnight, to the east end of Sin-Swept Bay. Fetch it out to the power boat you will see anchored there. Come alone. Don't be foolish enough to try any trickery. Tell no one about this. Come alone. Bring the box, with the thirty thousand dollars in it. Hand it over to the man on the power boat. You must not fail me. If you do, I am to be taken to Kommandrov, on the Siberian side, and you will never see me again. KIZZY.

Two-three times I read the note, but I couldn't make it out to be no different. Tolo he was just crying almost human, shoving his nose into my hand, running to the door and back. I opened the door, and we both went out and staggered to the beach. All I could do was drag my skin boat up a mite higher. Why, the way that gale was lashing by then, no skin boat could 'a' lived a minute in the smother of spume and driving seas that lay toward Sin Swept.

I went on back into the *barabara.* I couldn't do a thing but wait, and I don't know of no job that's tougher. As I and Tolo went in, the little ship clock on the mantel was striking eight bells—midnight.

IT was plumb daylight before that *mahtwillie* began to haul westering, and ease off. I'm just getting ready to shove off, when I see Simiak paddling in, which he lives no great distance away.

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When Simiak come in, first thing he asks is Tip here. I says no, he hain't.

"All right then," he says. "I was told to notify you prompt if he wasn't here. But you know it without me telling you."

After a lot of questioning, which is required with Aleuts, I deduces out facts as follers:

Seems the washing had piled up so both Tip and Simiak went out with skin boat loads to deliver, Tip going to the islands east, and Simiak west. Tip he got back to Squaw Duck first, just as it was getting dark. Tolo was acting just frantic. Tip went into the *barabara,* and they was no fire in the hell box.

Kizzy, of late, had been standing her shift to get the meals, and she was gone.

Tip is terrible uneasy, and he walks around nervous, and, likely a hour later, here comes Simiak, from the west way.

Soon as Simiak hits the beach, he searches out a note and hands it to Tip.

Tip goes into the house, lights a lamp, reads the note.

"Where you get this note, Simiak?" he asks, his voice terrible hoarse and strange, the Aleut said.

"I come by one gray boat anchored in Sin Swept," he said. "This Kizzy girl, she on that boat, and she call to me, and she hand me this, and say it not to show to no one but Tip Mallory, and hurry."

"Yes," says Tip, "it was Moxt Vangrief's boat."

"Sure," said Simiak. "I see him in the pilot house."

"Look now, Simiak," says Tip, terrible stern. "This Vangrief is part Aleut. You all Aleuts is plumb silent regarding each other, but you're going to tell me, and tell me now, all you know about Moxt Vangrief. Break out with some information, Simiak."

This Simiak says he was plumb terrified this Tip was going to claw him all apart, so Simiak spreads the reckoning. "This Moxt Vangrief he got plenty *tumtum.* He bad man for fight and kill. He makes plenty *pil chickamin,* Moxt does. One time he go to Kommandrov, on the Siberia side, where a prison camp is, and he help one prisoner to escape for plenty money. That not all. He make money another way too. Some time he pick up one fine white womans, maybe in Juneau, or Valdez, anywhere, and he take this fine womans to Kommandrov. There is one Jap mans and one Russian, and they pay Moxt Vangrief, and then the Jap and the Russian they sell this fine white womans maybe in Rio, or Port Said, or likely Shanghai. Moxt Vangrief, he smart man."

"Yes," said Tip, reading the note through again, "Moxt Vangrief is smart."

Then Tip asks Simiak closter regarding where the gray boat is anchored, and then he tells Simiak he might as well go on home. "You come here in the morning early," Tip says to Simiak. "If I hain't here, you take this here note, that I'll leave on the table, and you take that note over to the Thunderbird, and show it to Kap, and tell him all you've told me. You can go on home now, Simiak."

LATER, from sources various, I learns what Tip done exact after Simiak left. He walks around nervous, reads the note a hundred times, watches the clock. He just figures he's got to obey orders, and not

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go near that anchored boat till it says eight bells, midnight.

Tip he hain't hardly aware the *mahtwillie* storm has come up. He lays the note on the table, and he goes out to the store shed and lights the bug, a candle in a lard pail, and he goes to pawing in under a lot of old discarded nets, and some bales of worthless fox skins, and he digs out a zinc box eighteen inches long by eight or ten deep and wide, and he wraps it careful in one of the fox pelts, and reaves a thong of seal rawhide around it.

Still this Tip don't seem to realize they's a storm blowing. About eleven o'clock, giving him just about the time to get to Sin-Swept by twelve midnight, he pats Tolo good-by, puts the wrapped zinc box under the deck, shoves off his skin boat and goes smashing away into the seas that rolled all over him.

A man less powerful than this Tip would 'a' swamped a hundred times. He just lifted that skin boat by main strength, spun it, dodged the heaviest rollers, and somehow made it to the edge of Sin-Swept where the drive of the gale was broke a bit by the jag tooth range beyond.

Even so, the gray power boat was rolling deep in the troughs, and yanking savage at the anchor hawse. Maneuvering to keep into the lee of the power boat, Tip approached up, and he was being watched for, account of he seen the rays of a pocket flash shoot over the waves two-three times before he come up.

He wasn't no more than four-five lengths from the power boat when that searching finger of white light settled onto him, and held.

"You got it?" yelled a voice above the storm.

Tip reaches down under the decking, snags out the zinc box, in the pelt covering, holds it up at arm's length so the party on the power boat could see.

"All right," sings out the party. "Come on in. No monkey business. Put alongside. Shove the zinc box up onto the deck. Then you foller."

Tip sets his skin boat in till the nose touched. Again this flash settled onto him, and he could make out that Moxt Vangrief held the light in one hand, and one of them flat pistols in the other.

"Shove the box up onto the deck," Vangrief repeats.

Tip he just set there a second, looking around.

Right beside him, the work boat tender of the power boat was yanking at its painter that was made fast to the after bitt. Tip was doing a little swift calculating.

"Before I put the zinc box aboard," he yells, "I wants to know is Kizzy aboard—and all right."

"Yes, Tip," Kizzy answers hoarse from the pilot house. "I'm here. I—I'm all right. So you did have the zinc box. Oh, Tip!"

"Yes," he says, "I got the box. I'm coming alongside."

Slithering the paddle with one hand, he backs the skin boat up rail to rail with the work boat. The flashlight moves offen him for a second, and in that instant Tip slashes the painter of the work boat, letting it go adrift, plunks his own boat up to the rail, claps the zinc box down onto the deck, kicks his own skin boat away, and swarms aboard just as Vangrief snatches up the box.

This Tip sure had burned his bridges.

Whatever lay abeam, it was him and

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Moxt Vangrief for it, on that power craft rolling in the seas.

ALL this happened terrible sudden. As Vangrief snatches up the box, he kind of levels that flashlight again, and the rays pick up the work boat, and Tip's skin boat drifting away fast before the gale.

The breed dropped the box with a howl, shoved the gun at Tip. It's just that shaved second wherein Vangrief delays to swing the flashlight to direct his shooting that give this Tip a chanst.

With a swinging belt, Tip knocks the flashlight out of the breed's hand, slaps the gun aside just as it went off. Kizzy screams out frantic as the zinc box hits the deck, slides to the rail when the boat takes a violent list.

No one can tell exact what did happen. Kizzy makes a desperate dive out of the house, grabs the box as it was going overside. In that second the boat snaps back, catapulting Kizzy and the box in between Tip and Moxt Vangrief, and she gets a bump, a blow that knocks her up against the house.

And there she clung desperate, one hand rove into the rim of the hand rail, the other hanging to the box, while Tip and Moxt fought each other all over that plunging deck, like two mad Kodiak bears.

Half the time down onto the pitching deck, banging, clawing at each other, the wash of the boarding green water covered 'em complete. They was washed up to where Kizzy stood, sucked back again, clutching the rail desperate to keep from going overside.

No telling, in that inky dark, to which of them two the fight advantages was going. All Kizzy could see was the plunging blur of them two big men, hear the loud breathing, grunts, the sick thud of fists plunking into flesh.

She just clung there to the port brim, hanging onto the box, as one rail of the craft went under, tons of water washed the deck, then back, and the loud suck of the water in the scuppers.

Watching chance when the ship for a second rode even keel, she jumped into the house, fumbled, found the button, snapped it, flooded the deck with light.

Slam up against the after bitts, Vangrief is atop of Tip, one hand clutched into Tip's throat, the breed's free hand, with stiffened thumb, stabbing at Tip's eyes; every lick, Tip jerking his head this way, that, to save his eyes, laying open the flesh to the bone.

Of a sudden, advantaged by a heave of the ship, Tip bridged his body, spilled this Russian off, and is atop in a fish tail flirt, lamming in the belts to Vangrief's face and jaw.

The ship give a terrible, twisting heave. Down the slant of the deck they both slid, clawing for a holt, fetched up against the rail, come careening back, banged into the house.

Again this Tip, fighting deadly now, climbs Vangrief, and Tip drives in a belt would stagger a polar bear, and the ship lists again, and they just shoot to the rail, and Tip grabs a holt, and Vangrief misses, and they see him smother down into a sea, and one hand pokes up for a second, and he's gone.

Scrambling mad, Tip makes it back, and falls into the cabin. Yelling how they got to get out of there, Tip yanks open the hatch, falls down into the engine hold.

In a second he's back, the engine rumbling, and he slams down the hatch, jumps out when the boat rides

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even for an instant, slings off the anchor hawse, jumps back into the house, and shoves in the clutch.

This is a stanch craft all right, but the going was terrible. Them seas battered 'em, so every wash seemed like it would knock the upper works loose from the keel.

"WE'LL try for the shelter of Sin-Swept cliffs," Tip shouts, trying to peer through the wall of black that lays about.

"You think we'll make it, Tip?" she asks, anxious, bracing herself.

"Sure," he lied, spinning the wheel with them big hands.

"Oh, Tip, we've got to make it. Nothing matters a mite but for us to make it, and— I'm glad it's gone," she says. "As surely as I hope we make it, I'm glad it's gone."

"Gone?" says Tip, slinging himself onto the wheel to hold the craft against a surging sea. "Gone?"

"Yes, it's gone. When I sprang into the house, I dropped the zinc box, and it went overboard. I'm glad of it, Tip. I am, I am."

It's then that the boat slides into water a mite smoother, but the next minute Tip and Kizzy gets slung violent against the binnacle. The boat rode grinding and tearing up onto something, listed sharp to sta'board. Below, the stanchions fetched away! The ribs shore offen the keel! A mountain sea fell onto 'em! A second grind and a heave, and the whole after part of the boat tore loose and d r i f t e d away. There they was, Tip clutching Kizzy clost in one hand, while he hung to the shattered wall of the house with the other.

And still them seas broke all over 'em, with every smash the derelict rocking back and forth, every instant threatening to slide off this reef onto which they'd drove, or else split wide apart and spill 'em into the water.

"It's no great matter, Tip," said Kizzy. "I'm terrible thankful we got this few seconds left to us to make all clear. I know why you held out the zinc box. You thought it was better that I—that the money wouldn't do me any good. I know now why you didn't give it to me."

"What made you think final that I had it, Kizzy?"

"After you and Simiak left, Vangrief came in. He said again that you had the money. I said you hadn't. He said there was a simple way to prove it. I agreed. I went on his boat with him. Then—oh, the change in him—he said I was to write the note as I did. He said he wasn't fooling at all, that unless you brought out the box, with the money, he would take me to Kommandrov, and I'd never come back, and would never want to."

"I'm plenty bewildered over this here, Kizzy," said Tip, again clutching the girl and steadying her against another terrific sea. "I figured this Vangrief had stole that box. I know he was on the island before your father died. Tolo made that plain."

"Oh, he admitted that. He boasted of it. He watched, and when you left he crept around through the rocks at the back of the *barabara,* and after a while sneaked into the house. There was no one there but Tolo. Tolo attacked him, bit his hand. He beat Tolo off with his gun, searched the house. The zinc box was gone. He knew you had hidden it. But Tolo was making such a fuss, he ran back into the rocks, went to the far end of the island where he had left his boat.

"It's no matter now, Tip. I know now you kept the box, and the money,

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for my good. I know it. Tip, are we—have we got a chance, Tip?"

"Sure," says this Tip, very confident. "Hain't you remarked how them seas the last minute is all ways easier? Sure we got a chance. I'm going cautious onto what is left of the deck, and make a observation. Hang tight, Kizzy, to the wheel. Hang tight."

Tip gets down on his knees and careful he crawls through the pilot house door, and studies the shattered bits of deck, and the wash of the water slapping at the wreck.

Purty soon he crawls back into the house. He paws around and finds Kizzy's hand, and he puts her hand up onto his face. "You just feel, Kizzy. You make out how I'm grinning. Sure. You know, Kizzy, we're safe like into a church. We hit onto a reef top, and that reef top is raising up all the time, and it's the asbestos island coming back that your father give to me, and by another hour we'll be rich again, and no ways needing that zinc box at all."

Final this Tip did get senses together sufficient to say as follers:

"One little item, Kizzy. That there box that went overside didn't have no thirty thousand dollars into it. No, no. I knowed I'd never get to board Vangrief's boat 'less I seemed to have the zinc treasure box. Your dad he had two zinc boxes that he used to cut bait into, and go fishing. This here I fetches out was a plumb delusion."

"Then where is the box with the money, Tip?"

"I don't know. It's no matter, now we got our island back."

BY the time I and Simiak, and Tolo jumping in and going along in spite of us, had started out from Squaw Duck to see could we locate the Vangrief boat, the asbestos island had lifted twenty foot out of the water, and there in the high middle of it, setting down in the shelter of what was left of the craft, was Kizzy and Tip, and they was so plumb engrossed they never seen us till we was on the beach and Tolo was loping up toward 'em.

In just no time, them both being wet and cold, we had 'em down to the shore and into our *umiak,* and we was ready to start back only Tolo had squandered off. Tip yells to him, and he didn't come, and Tip starts up the slope, and I foller, and Tip he stops, and he yells excited for Kizzy to come too, and she done it, and there is Tolo sniffing at something that had got lodged down between two rock edges, and we go closter, and it was a zinc box, eighteen by about eight or ten wide and thick, and the edges of it had been smeared with tar to make it water tight, and a piece of rope had been rove around it, fastened to a rock.

It was the zinc box, with thirty thousand dollars into it. Old Hiyu had tarred that box, weighted it, rowed out and jettisoned it right above Tip's sunken asbestos island.

"You know," I says, official, "I figure my old *tillicum,* Hiyu Lorne, was give visions before he slipped his mortal hawser, and wisdom past understanding. He knowed Kizzy was better off without no money for a while. He figured deliberate, Hiyu did, when he sunk the treasure box above the asbestos island, that if ever it was found, the finding of it would link and tar splice you two together forever. Oh, yes, visions come to Hiyu Lorne before he died."

By then Kizzy was bawling and clinging frantic to Tip, so I shut up.

THE END

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The Blackbirds Sing

By DENNIS LAWTON

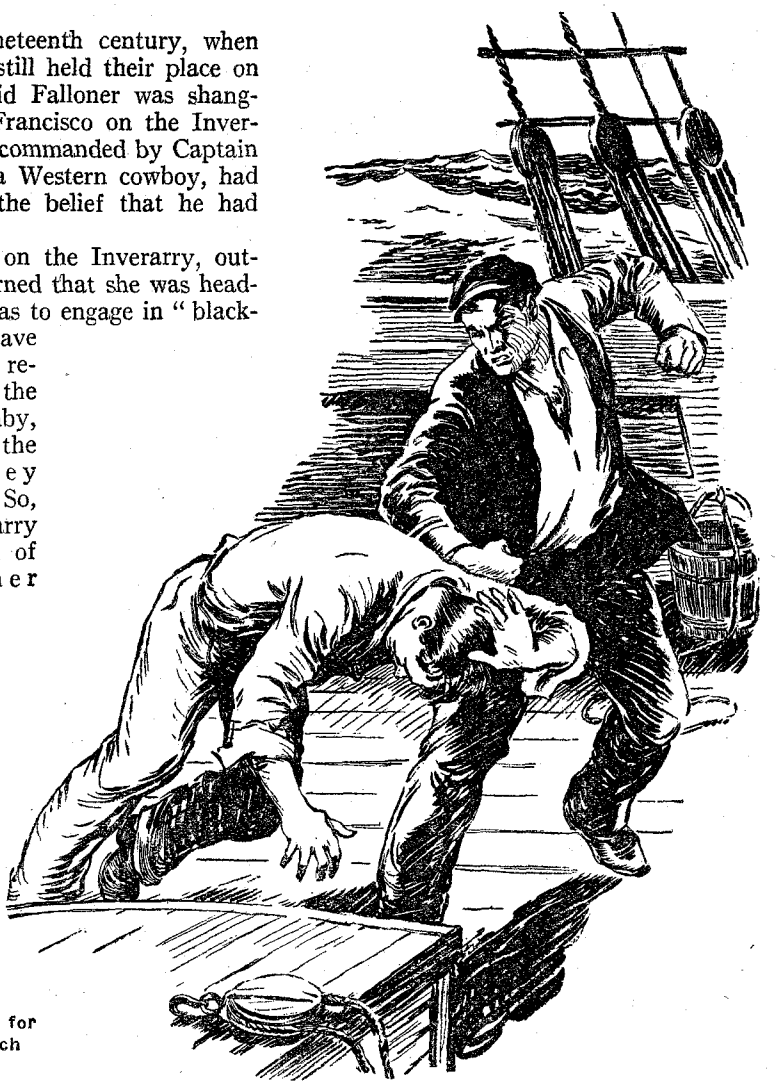
David Falloner, shanghaied to the South Seas, learns what it is really like to "live like a king"

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW

LATE in the nineteenth century, when sailing ships still held their place on the sea, David Falloner was shanghaied out of San Francisco on the Inverarry, a fast clipper commanded by Captain Tenby. Falloner, a Western cowboy, had fled the range in the belief that he had killed a man.

When he awoke on the Inverarry, outward bound, he learned that she was headed for the South Seas to engage in "blackbirding," or the slave trade. Falloner refused to bend to the will of Captain Tenby, and Jimmy Birch, the mate, and they "worked him up." So, when the Inverarry reached the island of Taholu, Falloner plunged into the water and swam ashore, despite the threatening horde of natives who were paddling out to the ship.

Ashore, Falloner was attacked by two native warriors. He killed them both, and saved a beautiful native girl who was also threatened. Shortly after, he was surprised and captured by a horde of the brown-skinned savages, and condemned to death. The presence of a white man among the



"Take it—you asked for it!" said Jimmy Birch

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natives, Angus Campbell, apparently a trader, could not avert his fate, but when the girl he had saved appeared with the heads of his two antagonists, Falloner's position suddenly changed from that of condemned man to hero.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HERO.

THAT triumphal procession advanced straight into the village until it came to the largest of the native huts; and there the majority of the people went on, but the girl, the chief, and Falloner were carried into the interior, with Falloner still wondering how it chanced that he was a hero for killing a pair of the islanders. The hut was a single room, forty feet long by twenty broad and high, and its furnishings reduced life at a stroke to a cool delightfulness of simplicity. For sitting or lounging—and the islanders nearly always either lay flat or reclined—two logs were laid close to the back wall of the house and the two-yard interval between them was heaped with mats worked in such bright colors that it seemed, by the first glance, to be a strip of wild flowers.

The floor was compacted earth; the only furnishings consisted in certain packages, large or small, which hung from the ridge pole, together with a number of spears and throw-spears and hatchets, k n i v e s and various other weapons arranged inside the front wall of the place. The walls themselves were of an open cane-work which allowed a good deal of air and tempered light to enter.

Falloner felt for an instant like a bird in a cage. In fact, he was in such a mood of relief that he was ready to l a u g h at anything, and there were things that needed laughter.

He had no sooner entered the hut than he was instructed by gestures to sit on the heaped mats, which he did, and was immediately surrounded by a crowd. They acted as though they never had seen a white man before, though Campbell lived among them. But they were continually sifting his pale hair through their fingers, and the men liked nothing so much as to pick up one of his arms and turn up the white of the inside, laughing and pointing.

The very texture of his skin seemed a marvel to them which they had to touch, and their curiosity went several stages further until he struck away their hands. Here the golden girl appeared before him and intervened with some angry words that scattered the islanders. The hut was cleared.

The crowd left behind them a ringing in Falloner's ears and the singular sweetness of fragrances which he never had known before. They had been repulsive on the bodies of cannibals ready to eat him; they were oddly pleasant since the cannibals had become friends. He wanted to laugh, and did, while the girl found his eyes and accompanied him; her voice was a delightful music and a new one.

NOW she made some eloquent gestures to ask if he were hungry. As though a sailor were ever anything else after a voyage of several thousand miles, plus half a day in a sweating jungle! They brought him a feast.

First, a gourd filled with a thin, sticky paste. The girl dipped into it first to show how the trick was done and licked her fingers c l e a n, then washing her hand in half a coconut shell of water. When Falloner tried the stuff, he dropped half of it on the

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matting, got some on his cheek, and only a little in his mouth. It had a taste slightly pungent and sour but not unpleasant, and his hunger burst bounds at once.

A few drops of the paste had run up as high as his wrist, and the chief, the girl, and several women and a pair of children who seemed to be members of the household rocked with laughter. It amazed Falloner to see the chief sway his giant body from side to side and hold his ribs with his great hands while he howled out his delight. But the girl kept her eyes warm with friendship while she laughed. She showed him with more care how to do the thing. For first she dipped her hand into the gourd, twirled the forefinger in the paste, and, raising it, with a singular flourish forced it to gather into a small ball which disappeared at once into her mouth; and her hand was immediately rinsed clean in the water. He imitated clumsily; but the slightly sour taste pleased him; he felt as though he could raise that gourd and drink off the sticky contents.

He was not allowed to. Other food was brought, a section of roasted breadfruit, a pressed cake, bananas, and always the drink of the juice of young coconuts served in their own shells.

In the meantime some of the women had been rasping the meat of ripe coconuts into fine flakes, and this was placed in a net and squeezed until the rich coconut milk flowed down and covered a shell half filled with prepared breadfruit. The result crowned the feast; it was, it seemed to Falloner, the most delicious food he had ever tasted.

And, as he ate avidly, the girl watched him, crouching close and lifting her eyes every time he raised his hand to his mouth. With every morsel he swallowed she smiled and nodded, and said softly, "Ha!" as though he might need encouragement.

He was fairly filled, before very long, and now the chief took from his belt a pipe with a curiously carved bowl that looked like a caricature of a bird with its wings thrown back and with a long red reed for a pipe-stem. This he filled, took a puff or two, and handed it to the girl after he had wiped the mouthpiece. She smoked in turn, two whiffs, raising her head and deliberately, smilingly blowing the smoke into the face of Falloner as if she were conferring a favor.

He took the pipe in his turn and dragged down several long whiffs to the bottom of his lungs. The tobacco was mild and sweet. He could have smoked two or three such pipes one after another, but the quietly expectant faces of the others in the house made him proffer it to them. They took it as soon as he had cleaned the mouthpiece in his turn, and so the pipe made the circuit of the entire group, each taking two whiffs and some only one. It had returned to him again when Angus Campbell came into the house and with him brought a white-skinned girl.

SHE was deeply tanned, yet she was pale compared to the golden skins of the Taholans. Even the contrast of her crisp white clothes was not enough to darken her complexion; the very gold of her hair seemed pale. Falloner, in haste, rose to his feet.

The trader was hurrying towards him with extended hand.

"My dear Falloner!" he said. "How damned fortunate—beg pardon, Penelope! My daughter—David Falloner. I'll have you up at my house

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in a moment. But why didn't you tell me that the pair you killed were hillmen? Didn't you know that the Haggari were the mortal enemies of these lowlanders?"

"I couldn't tell one from the other," admitted Falloner.

The girl was the right sort to see in the tropics, he thought. She had a cool look. A little too cool, perhaps, as though she were little interested in his recent escape.

Her father was saying, "The chief says that you're a great man, Falloner. And so you are, because you've paid the account of that murdering devil, Totono, the chief of the Haggari. One of their chiefs, at least; the poison on their spear-points, I'd say. He's lifted more Taholan heads than a man would like to count; and now you're giving them the pleasure of smoking *his* head as a good relic. They'll do anything for you; name what you want!"

"A chance to bargain with Captain Tenby," said Falloner. "That's all I want. A chance to get away from the island on his ship with him; and that means he'll have to have an opportunity of careening the Inverarry and repairing it, I think. If I make a bargain with him, he may stick to it. Do you think that the Taholans would do that much for him?"

"You've had trouble enough with Tenby already," said Campbell. "The trading company I represent sends out one ship a year, and it will be here inside of six months. Why not wait for that?"

"Wait — six—months?" exclaimed Falloner.

Campbell nodded with a smile of understanding.

"I'll talk it up with them," said the trader. "Penelope, stay here and talk with him, will you?"

Penelope sat down on the matting with the grace of an islander; and the golden lady was instantly fluting at her in that lovely voice and making gestures towards Falloner.

Penelope Campbell translated, "She says that she wants to be your wife."

"Wife?" cried Falloner.

The cool, steady eyes of the white girl read his face almost insolently; but then she must have spent her life regarding inferiors, savages, and she had not learned that an imperial manner was not wanted by her peers.

The Taholu girl was chanting again, and Penelope translated, "Her name is Lavia Laia. That means Heaven Face, or H e a v e n l y Face, or a face like heaven, or Heaven in the Face, however you want to translate it—or say it. I suppose she's the loveliest—or one of the loveliest—of the Taholu girls, on the whole."

She paused to estimate the unconcealed charms of Heaven Face with the unconcern of a slaver fixing a price.

"She really is," said Penelope. "And she says that she loves you a great deal—let me see how much." She thought for a moment, remembering the words. "As a hungry bird loves fruit. She loves you as much as that. Or as the hillmen love salt. That's the way she loves you."

Penelope smiled, neither at Falloner nor at the girl, but at the quaintness of the conceit which she had just put into words.

"TELL her it's very nice of her," said Falloner, "but that I'm a married man with five children in the States—"

"Are you?" asked Penelope, her clear, blue-gray eyes searching him indifferently.

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"Well, it would be a way out," said Falloner.

"I don't think it pays to lie to the natives," said Penelope more coldly than ever.

"But what *shall* I tell this girl?"

"Isn't there anything you *want* to tell her?" asked Penelope. "She's quite a good girl. Some of them are a bit promiscuous, but not Lavia Laia. She's what white people call honorable—or is the word 'decent'?"

"You talk as though she were a shell on the beach!" exclaimed Falloner.

"Do I?" asked the girl. "I'm sorry. But here is Lavia Laia—it's a lovely name, don't you think?—asking you with all her heart if you will marry her. She says that she is a good dancer and that her father is rich; he has two canoes. Besides that, she knows where to catch fish, and she's not afraid of sharks. She has a taboo against them. Her father has a second house, and you may live in it."

"But—great God—no, no!" said Falloner.

"Can't you say it more gently than that?" asked Penelope. She put her lovely head on one side and looked at the island girl. Nothing disturbed her gravity; she smiled like a mother on the Face of Heaven. "Look at her and try to say something kind."

Falloner closed his eyes. He saw the picture, again, of Heaven Face standing on the rock holding up the two fresh, gory heads.

"Tell her that I'm sailing away when I can, but that I'll come back," said he.

"But will you?" asked she.

"No!" said Falloner.

"Then don't tell her that. Don't you think she's worth the truth?"

Falloner stared not at Penelope, but at Lavia Laia. Then he took her hands. They were cool, and the skin was as delicate as a soft, sheer fabric; no work of any kind had hardened her fingers. She sat up straight and drew his hands up to her breast, smiling at him. "Tell her," said Falloner, "that she's the most beautiful girl—bar one—that I ever saw in my life. Tell her that my heart jumps right whang up into my throat when I look at her—and God knows that's the truth—but tell her that I'm going to leave the island at once and go away, and that perhaps I'll never be able to come here again."

"Do you know," said Penelope Campbell, "that she's the daughter of the king? She's the daughter of the great Kopana himself; those are the two heirs to the crown—the two standing by the door—and they're her brothers."

Falloner glanced at the two handsome lads, each in his late teens, and then stared back at the white girl.

"You talk as though I'd be a fool not to marry her!" he said.

"Well, wouldn't you be?" asked Penelope. "Of course I don't know. I don't know about that other girl who you say is still lovelier than Lavia Laia. Shall I tell her now exactly what you have said?"

"Please do," said Falloner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARGAIN.

A CALL from Angus Campbell was a welcome disturbance to Falloner at that moment; and as he went to join the trader and the chief, he saw Penelope going out of the house with her arm around Heavenly Face, talking softly and earnestly while the young islander looked up in a sad dream to her companion and let her

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feet find their own way. A sudden stinging, wounding regret tormented Falloner as he watched them pass out into the brilliance of the sunshine; they were translated suddenly and forever from his life, he felt. But the regret passed as he remembered that he had an iron purpose—there was still something to be done between him and Captain Tenby.

As he joined the chief, Malakola, the Taholan took up a mantle of white cloth, fine to look at and slightly rough in texture, and tossed it over Falloner, smiling as he did so.

"Malakola," said the trader, "has made up his mind. He had an idea that the ship must have been sent him by the kind spirits to give him a supply of powder and shot and the guns of the white men so that he could conquer the whole island and run the hillmen into the sea.

"But he sees—since you're a specimen—that there are only good men on board that ship." Here Angus Campbell winked broadly. "And so," said Campbell, "Malakola is willing to help the captain repair his ship and even put some supplies aboard her. He'll ask the two sons of the king, Sahi and Nito, to take charge of the natives if the captain needs any help—I suppose he'll want to careen the Inverarry? But everything and every offer is to be made through you as a matter of courtesy. If you're in a hurry—and I think you'd better be—we'll start off to the ship now."

Falloner was eager to go. There was that debt to Tenby which, in some manner, had to be paid. In ten minutes he was at the waterside with the trader, and they stepped into a great war-canoe which was decorated with flashing pearl shell. The shadow from the reaching prow glided over the smooth waters of the bay, showing the ragged, barbarous profile of some god or spirit that slid just beneath them, with folded arms. And a score of paddles shot them out towards the Inverarry with full expedition.

Malakola himself had not come along because, he said, he had no wish to see many white men and think of trouble and the vows he had made against them; for it was a deep sacrilege to have in the sacred bay any except the privileged ship of Campbell's trading company.

Standing in the prow of the boat were the two tall youths, the sons of the great king, Kopana. They would take charge. The trader talked a little about that famous, fat savage who, sitting in the cool of his house all day long, constantly tasted food, slept, and ate again, and slept once more. But his sons looked as keen and swift as greyhounds.

THE sharp-bladed paddles soon had the big canoe near the Inverarry.

Falloner stood up and hailed, "Ahoy, the Inverarry!"

"Ahoy, there, canoe!" shouted one of the watch. "Hey, and God strike me, is that you, Falloner? How'd you get out of the belly of the shark, Jonah?"

From the men who were working in the rigging a long continued shout of wonder went up. Captain Tenby himself appeared by the taffrail—with his book under his arm—and waved to the canoe.

"Hai, Falloner!" he called. "I thought you were giving the sharks indigestion before this. How did the Taholans miss a chance to slip you into their stew-pot?"

"I've come out to strike a bargain,"

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said Falloner. He waved towards the mouth of the bay where a dozen of the largest canoes were gathered along the beaches, ready to put out at a moment's notice. "They've corked the neck of the bottle, Captain Tenby, as you can see for yourself."

"I can see as far as that," agreed the captain. "Come aboard and we'll talk. Is that you, Angus Campbell?"

"It's I, Tenby," said the trader. "I'm sorry to see that you're still in the dirty business. Do you mind, man, that if a word of the truth about you comes to the islanders they'll take you on the run and cook the whole lot of you?"

"I know it perfectly well," said Tenby calmly. "But a man like you and an upright Christian like Falloner, yonder—you don't want to see white men cooked to feed islanders. Campbell, has not a word about blackbirds been said to the Taholans?"

"Would they be sitting at a distance waiting for orders if they even dreamed what you are?" demanded Campbell.

"No, that's true enough," agreed Tenby. "God knows that I'm anxious to get clean out of Taholu as soon as I can."

"Talk to Falloner," suggested the trader. "He's done some big things since he landed a few hours ago. It's for his sake, and nothing else, that Kopana and his head chief, Malakola, will turn you free from the bay. Here are the sons of the king in the bows of the canoe to give you help and order the men about if you have to careen your ship."

OF course every one on board the Inverarry could hear these words, and before Tenby could answer, a long, howling shout of relief and of exultation burst from every throat. Tenby, looking up at his men in the rigging, smiled a little. When there was a silence he said, "Falloner, what bargain do you want to drive?"

"An easy one," said Falloner. "I want passage to the first port of call and then money enough to pay my passage home, together with compensation for the time I've lost. I'll call that a thousand dollars, all told."

"Ah," said the captain, "that includes interest on everything, I suppose?"

"No," said Falloner. "I'll manage to get the interest later on."

"Well," said Tenby, "I'll give my word to all that; it's rather hard for a captain to have to pay off a member of his crew—a deserter at that—on such high terms. But let it all slip. I agree to everything; you shall have your way because you must have it, Falloner."

"Can you trust him?" asked the trader.

"As long as I have him on a leash," said Falloner. He added, "Make out a demand order for the payment of five thousand dollars by your company to the company of Mr. Campbell, to be cashed in case David Falloner is not delivered in good health in San Francisco within three months from today."

"Five thousand—I'll be damned before I'll do it!" shouted Tenby, shaking a fist over his head.

"You'll be damned if you don't," said Falloner. "I have the whip hand, Tenby, and do you think that I'll be fool enough not to use it?"

A brief murmur ran through the crew, all silent, at watch. The captain whirled on them and shouted, "Get to your work, you lazy dogs, and jump to it. Mister, are you asleep? Stir them

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up and let them have it lively." He added, over his shoulder towards the canoe, "Give me five minutes below—"

He disappeared down the companionway as Campbell said, "You're a brave man, Falloner, to trust your life in the hands of a man like Tenby when he has a reason to hate you."

"I'll be as safe with him," answered Falloner, "as a child in its mother's arms, once he's passed that demand note to you."

"But murder will be choking Tenby every moment he looks at you."

The captain, reappearing, held in his hand a slip of paper that trembled in the wind.

"Here you are, Campbell," he said. "These are hard lines—damned hard lines—but I have to follow them!"

AT a word from the trader, the canoe was brought under the side of the ship and Campbell stood up to take the priceless little slip of paper. He noted the writing, nodded, folded it, and put it into his wallet.

"Will you step aboard, Mr. Campbell?" asked the master of the ship.

"I would rather step into the dirtiest corner of hell than onto the deck of a blackbirder, Tenby," said the trader. "D'you see, yonder, the bit of a flag over my house?"

The house was almost lost in the mass of great trees that surrounded it, but a bit of the peaked roof showed and above the roof the slowly curling and uncurling folds of the Stars and Stripes.

"Every man that lives under a decent flag," said Campbell, "ought to spend his money and his blood to drive you bloodsuckers from the face of the sea." He turned sharply on Falloner. "Take my advice and wait till my company's ship comes. It'll be better for you in every way, my friend."

There was no doubt of that, except for two things. One was that unsettled score against Tenby; the other trouble he felt as a queer thrilling in his blood and an uneasiness of his heart, as he looked towards the white-thatched roofs of the native village.

He answered, "If I stay a month, I may never be able to leave in all the days of my life. It's better for me to go today."

"Ah? The native girls?" asked the Scotch-American, with a slight touch of disgust in his voice.

"No," said Falloner slowly. "No—not the *native* girls." And his blue eyes looked steadily into those of Campbell.

"Ha?" murmured the trader. "Is that it?" He seemed about to break out in anger but changed his voice at once. "But, after all, a sailor fresh from the sea thinks every lass is out of heaven. However—well, you're your own master, and no doubt you know best. Good-by, Falloner. You'll have a green memory here in Taholu for your one day on the island. Captain Tenby, how long will it take you to make your repairs and get out of the bay?"

"It's flood tide now," said the captain, his face and eye perfectly clear in spite of the dressing down which Campbell had given him the moment before. "I can float the ship in on the sand of that island in the bay yonder. The hole we have to stop is not far down below the water-line, and once it's exposed, the carpenter can plug it in an hour. We'll be out on the next tide. We'll be out by dark, perhaps, if some of the islanders can give us a hand."

"That will be done," said Camp-

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bell. "And—if there's any God you believe in, you'd better offer up thanks to Him and David Falloner, Captain Tenby."

CHAPTER IX.

TRICKERY.

THE actions of the captain, when he greeted Falloner on deck, were as perfectly easy and even as though they had never been anything but the greatest of friends. He patted his deserter on the shoulder and merely said:

"Brains will tell, Falloner. No doubt about it. Give me that credit, my lad. I recognized the brains in you the moment I met you. Had to have you on board my ship. Knew that there would be a use for you. So, as I said to you the other day in my own cabin, we can be of use to one another; we have been, as you see, already. Here, mister! Open the slop chest and rig an outfit for Mr. Falloner."

"For 'Mister' Falloner?" growled the mate.

"He's a gentleman passenger now, you fat-faced fool!" snapped the captain. "Treat him as such from now on. He sleeps on the sofa in my own cabin!"

The careening of the ship went forward very smoothly, for the captain knew his business. He could talk a language close enough to the Taholan to make them understand him perfectly; and the two young princes readily gave effect to his suggestions by passing on commands to the natives. They went further still; they laid with their own royal hands a taboo on every bit of cargo that was shifted out of the clipper to lighten her before she tipped on her side. This cargo, mostly in boxes, was passed over the side by the sailors, received by the Taholans, and piled by them in turn upon the beach of the little island in the harbor where Tenby now had placed his ship, touching the sand of the sloping beach.

Strong lines were rigged from the lower masts to the spars which were sunk in the sand of the beach, and the natives, under the personal supervision of the captain and the princes, hauled on the ropes so that the Inverarry was gradually tilted over on her side as the sea declined rapidly.

Under tarpaulins on the beach the moved cargo was left without even a guard over it, because, as Tenby well pointed out, a hundred men with rifles would hardly have been able to hold off the spear-rush of the Taholans at close quarters, whereas the sacred laying on of the princely hands had secured everything with a taboo better than it could have been protected by steel walls.

"That's the advantage," declared Tenby to Falloner—who was comfortable in sailor togs again—"of dealing with islands where they have a real king. In most of the places you touch with a ship there's a chief to every new mile, and the head chief over all has no advantage over the rest except that he can wear a higher headdress. But in Taholu it's different. They've had one royal family as far back as they can remember. And everything that one of the blood royal touches is sacred. Those two princes, now—why, the whole island would go mad if anything happened to them. You see how they make the islanders work? Nothing but the royal word would get a drop of sweat out of their bodies. The royal word—or the whips on the Australian cotton plantations! Aye—the whips would do it!"

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And he narrowed his bright blue eyes and set his jaw hard. Falloner was to remember that, later. He could tell, by afterthought, the exact moment when the criminal idea had entered the brain of the sailor.

THE tide did not have to drop far before the carpenter with a gang of assistants was at work repairing the leaks, sawing out some of the chafed and broken boards and replacing them with strong, fresh lumber from the quantity which every wise trader who knew the reefs of the South Seas was sure to have on board. While some men worked with the carpenter on the outside, the carpenter's mate with others labored on the inside to make a double patch wherever the hull had been injured extensively. Pitch made a water-tight skin over the whole job before the tide began to raise the floats again.

On the island was continual carnival, by this time, for the Taholu women had brought out provisions to the men, and there was one long feast to which the sailors were freely invited. Tenby, firm as a dragon, refused to let them go.

"To look at those girls is hard enough on sailors," he told Falloner. "No, not on cold-blooded fellows like you and me, but on the regular tar it's a strain. To look at them is bad enough—but when Jack stands next to one of those costumes of flowers and smiles, his brains begin to split. He's ready to desert the ship even if he knows that he'll be a dead man the next moment."

A special canoe load of gifts, however, came out for Falloner from the king himself, and was delivered together with a long speech from the feathered chief who made the presentation. The gifts consisted of tortoise shell, clubs, and spears curiously carved, the beautiful white tappa cloth made of beaten bark fibers, grass dresses embroidered with beads and shells, delightfully woven baskets with colored patterns worked into them, carved dishes and bowls, and a thousand other little curios, together with one large, strongly covered bowl whose contents could not be made out. It crowned the entire heap.

The captain, making a rapid survey, said, "If you get that stuff back to San Francisco shops, you can rake in five thousand dollars even from merchants. Ten thousand would be closer to the mark. They've given you some of their best treasures, Falloner. Tell me, in God's name, how you managed to capture their hearts. Do they think you're a great taboo because the sharks failed to eat you?"

Falloner smiled and said nothing.

And yet he did not feel altogether like smiling as he looked, towards the close of the day, in the direction of the village, across the bay, and listening to the sweet, strange voices of the women on the island, unhappiness grew in him.

It would be very easy to step into a canoe and be rowed by those powerful and willing hands back to a life of ease, the life of the cheerful and dreamy lotus-eaters.

What he left behind him here he would never find in the crisper, colder air of the northern lands. Here he could be a chief, a lord among lordly men; and up there he would be a man wanted for murder. His whole heart was turning back to Taholu, and yet a resolution was anchored deep and firm somewhere in a higher self; he could trust to its strength to hold him. That glimmer of bunting over the trader's

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house—perhaps it was that which kept pouring a higher strength into him.

IN the meantime, the lifting tide was straightening the ship until it rode on an almost even keel, and the arms of the sailors were weary receiving box after box of cargo from the islanders and restoring them to the hold.

Between decks, the whole scene had been altered. Lanterns were hung out to make a fine glow, and Captain Tenby had broached casks of whisky and rum. Some of the liquor he had mashed up with fruits brought out to the ship by the Taholans; more of it was left in its native strength and fire.

The fruit punch he carried with his own hands to the rails and began to ladle it down the throats of the islanders. It was like feeding raw meat to wolves. Those who had once tasted and coughed at the first rankness of the new flavor suddenly began to yelp for more; and the captain, with a generosity that amazed Falloner, would not keep the expensive stuff away from them. He merely insisted with great courtesy that the two princes should be the first to board his ship; and in a moment they were over the rail and stepping side by side, half frightened and half proud, across the deck.

It was they who led the way into the hold where the drinks were set out. Falloner, peering down into the deep, lighted interior, saw the natives dipping their hands into the brimming casks of strong liquor and scoffing it off like water.

Some of them were unsteady on their feet in a few moments. There were scores and scores of them packing into the hold. There were two hundred jostling, chanting, laughing, staggering, golden-skinned Taholans in the hold, and more were entering.

Men were aloft setting sail to take advantage of the wind when the ship should float clear of the sand and the anchor could be pulled up and catted.

The mate came up to him and took him by the arm.

"Come forward a minute, will you, Mr. Falloner?" asked Birch.

FALLONER went slowly forward with the mate, thinking his way through a fog until he saw, at both the forward and after hatches, a number of the sailors. Then the truth was struck into his brain as though by a great bell-clapper. The intention of the captain was clear as the end of this tropical day. He had his hold full of blackbirds—and now he would simply clap down the hatches over their heads and let the wind blow him out to sea!

"Wait!" exclaimed Falloner. "By God, mister, this thing can't be done!"

The ship stirred, suddenly lifted and swayed forward, stopping with a jerk, and at the same time the great, booming voice of Tenby rang down the decks, "Cover those hatches—and look to it lively! Boatswain, cut the anchor cable—sheet home that foresail, you damned, wooden-headed lubbers, up there aloft!"

It was all done in a stroke. The heavy hatch covers were slipped into place and secured for the moment with the bolts before the islanders in the hold had the faintest conception of what was going on.

The swinging ax of the boatswain bit through the anchor cable.

"You can't do it—get out of my way, Birch!" shouted Falloner.

He thrust the mate away from him.

"Well—take it, then. You've asked for it," said Jimmy Birch.

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And Falloner, as he started to run, was struck down by a heavy blow from behind.

He was not totally stunned. His eyes could still see, but his brain could not register an understanding of the truth. And over his wavering body, as he supported himself on a knee and a hand, stood the mate ready for a second stroke.

There were left on the deck some dozen bewildered, unarmed islanders who stood agape, on their way to join their companions in the hold, but as the wind leaned its shoulder into the sails and the Inverarry gathered way with a quick ease, like the thoroughbred she was, the truth came howling up from the throats of the Taholans, and they were instantly over the rails, a dozen golden flashes that dissolved in the water of the blue bay.

The motion of the ship told the poor devils in the hold what was happening, also; and a furious beating at the hatches began, and a wild, endless breath of lament.

It was picked up on the shore of the island where the ship had been careening. But already the clipper was a cable's length away before the bewilderment of the islanders was turned into action. Then, at last, they leaped into their canoes and commenced the pursuit with a storm of battle cries.

Aft, the captain was mustering two-thirds of the crew, armed to the teeth with repeating rifles if the canoes approached them too close, but there was little chance of that. The freshening wind swept the Inverarry more and more swiftly along through the rippling gold and blue of the bay; for a moment the cliffs of the entrance to the harbor blanketed her sails, but then the stronger wind of the outer sea caught her and sent her leaping ahead. Behind them the despairing cries of the islanders died gradually down.

That was how Falloner saw the departure from Taholu, dimly, in the dark whirl of a nightmare as the blood gathered and roared in his ears.

"AND you see," said Captain Tenby, sitting at his table in his cabin and drinking a bowl of rum punch with a connoisseur's careful slowness, "that from the first the thing was in the air. Grant me that, Falloner. When I saw that damned bright blue eye of yours, I knew the shine of the steel in it. And I said to myself that you were a man I needed. Needed? My God, what a fool I would have been not to have taken you! Needed? Tell me when another trader ever managed to fill his hold with two hundred blackbirds for nothing but a bit of wasted rum?

"And here is the most beautiful part of the whole affair—Campbell will be paid home for his damned insolence. The natives themselves will pay him. And they'll eat him with more gusto than I'm drinking this punch.

"D'you see how perfect it all is, Falloner? But it's owing to you, my lad. Sit up here and share this punch with me. All owing to you, Falloner. You can see that from the first we've been partners, unaware!"

But Falloner lay flat on the sofa with his face buried in his crossed arms, trembling as though he were under a whip.

"And here," went on Tenby, "is something that ought to cheer you up. Here's the covered package they brought you. I'll open it up and we'll take a look."

Falloner heard the noise of a sharp knife cutting through many bindings.

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And then from the captain a screech of fear. Tenby's voice ran up through the high female octave of terror. Falloner, starting up, saw the captain on the stagger, blinded by his own hands as he crashed back against the wall, and on the table in the midst of the opened bowl appeared a head whose skin had been darkened and dried by smoke, but which retained a thick-lipped smile and a glint of mockery in the half-closed eyes.

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT!

FOR three days the trade wind carried the Inverarry softly and smoothly on; for three days Falloner listened to the screechings and groanings of the poor natives between decks. Then Captain Tenby opened the hatches and let the natives come up in batches to be heartened by a sight of the sun and the feel of the sea-wind.

They seemed to have shrunk. They had disappeared into the hold as powerful a looking lot of men as Falloner ever had seen; they appeared again, wilted, downheaded.

Tenby made a speech to each batch of the natives. And Jimmy Birch, with a grin, translated one of these. It was not very long, but it rose to this crescendo:

"My children, you blame me for carrying you away from your homes. But I carry you away to show you that there are many places in the world as beautiful as Taholu. To stay in one place forever is not what we are meant to do. Otherwise, we could not be given legs to walk with or canoes with paddles.

"What does the parent bird do when the young refuse to leave the nest? It pushes them rudely over the side, and as they fall through the air they begin to use their wings. I have done the same thing. I have pushed you out of your nest where you had seen everything and could learn no more. Now be happy, because I am going to show you new things."

And the islanders, lifting their heads, regarded the white man with a vague and not at all a malevolent eye. It seemed that they could not maintain even hatred very long. They had fallen into a sadness complete and perfect, like the broken-hearted sadness of children.

Falloner said to the mate, "Why does Tenby waste time talking to them like that when he intends to sell them as blackbirds on the plantations?"

"You ask him," grinned the mate. "He could tell you better than me."

So Falloner asked the captain that night when he sat in the cabin. Except for the whack on the head that had stopped him when he tried to interfere with the great kidnaping, he had been very well treated and slept on the sofa in the captain's own room. Captain Tenby, listening to the question, sipped his rum punch and smiled on Falloner.

"My dear lad," he said, "the white man is steel. He bends and springs back into place. But the Taholan is cast-iron; strong as the devil for some uses, but a sharp blow breaks it. Literally breaks. Warriors, most of these fellows.

"But any one of them could be killed—by what? Why, by a harsh word, a shame, or a grief.

"They go off into the woods and hold their heads in their hands and die in a week. They feed on coconuts and plantains; but they have to have hope,

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also. So I let them suffer for three days; then I pipe them up from the hold in batches and feed them a little hope, repeating the same message over and over.

"If I said it only once, it would not do. But the first time, they don't understand, the second time they begin to doubt, the tenth time they believe there is something ahead of them. Their appetites pick up. I've had them singing before they reach Australia!"

Here footfalls thumped down the steps outside.

"A sail, sir!" bawled the voice of a seaman.

"Let it sail, my friend," said the captain. And he added:

"'Sail on, sail on, O ship of state,
Sail on, O Union, strong and great—'"

"It ain't sailing on, sir," said the sailor, appearing at the threshold. "It's bearin' right down on us under a heavy press of sail. It's a big steam frigate, sir, and we can see the rows of ports."

THE captain rose in silence and buttoned up his coat with a black look at the bowl of punch which he was leaving behind him. Falloner went up on deck after him, and saw, white and lovely in the moonlight, the towering masts of a great ship close to them and having the wind. The breeze was light, and the sweeping cloud of smoke from the funnels of the steamship helped her sails so well that she was walking up on the Inverarry hand over hand.

Crowds of shadowy figures swarmed her decks.

Falloner heard the hail and the captain's ready answer, "This is the ship Inverarry, of San Francisco, Captain Walker Williams commanding; trading to the islands."

The answer came back in clear English that was clipped with a distinctly foreign accent, "This is the French ship Arethuse, Captain Émile Poupardin commanding. Stand by while I come aboard you, if you please!"

"If you please!" growled Tenby. "Damn your pleases! It's one of the damned French pirates that call themselves sea-police. Mister, back the main sail and bring her to. French! I'd police them off the face of the earth! Look to it lively, men, fore and aft. A lot of prying French are coming aboard us.

"But I'll close their eyes for them. I'll trim the poodles into foolish shapes, like their dogs. Steward, more punch! And break out some of that red Bordeaux. No, the Burgundy! God forgive me for wasting my best wine on French scum!

"Remember, lads—remember all of you that I am now Captain Walker Williams. Not so many know the face of Captain Tenby, but his name has been smoke in the eyes of certain landlubbers for a good many years. A few seamanly lies, from all of you, or the kit and cargo of us will spend the rest of our lives in a stinking French jail! If they pry below decks into the hold and get even a whiff of the Taholans, God help us. Boatswain, see that you have the boat's crew thoroughly drunk within ten minutes after they come aboard.

"Prudence, my lads, all of you. 'The prudent man may direct the state; the enthusiast makes it great or ruins it.' Have an eye to yourselves. One man may ruin us."

The care of the captain extended in all directions except towards Falloner, who walked to the lee rail and leaned there, thoughtfully. He glanced back across the deck to see a boat swing

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smartly down from the side of the French ship; heard the brisk commands in the clanking French; and saw the flash of the swinging oars. The steam frigate was now bearing up into the wind, and it rode quietly near the Inverarry as the visiting officers came aboard.

Falloner could hear the names distinctly as "Captain Walker Williams" greeted the guests. They were no less persons than Captain Émile Poupardin himself and Monsieur Henri Delisle, French Commissioner for their Possessions in the South Seas! Tenby had not caught one Tartar. He had two of them aboard!

Tenby was the soul of cordiality. He said:

"Let your men go through the ship, commissioner. By all means. No, don't apologize. I understand that the sea must be policed. I wish it were better cared for. But, then, it is a little larger than the kitchen floor of *madame,* eh? No, my friends, you are welcome. Tell your fellows to go everywhere as they please, while the three of us sit in my cabin and have a glass of rum punch—the best Jamaica. Or, if you will have it, there is excellent Burgundy. Between life and death, one must drink, now and then."

THE Frenchmen, beginning to laugh, were hustled forward into the cabin in this manner; and still as they sat in the captain's cabin, Falloner could hear their laughter drifting upwards.

As for the boat's crew which was to search the Inverarry, they got as far as the after hatch, and, removing the false top, probed into the surface cargo of canned goods, and cared to go no deeper. They did not care because a bucket of steaming grog was carried out to them, and they were soon making themselves welcome.

The visit would pass over with no bad results, Falloner could see. As for himself, if he rushed in to tell the Frenchmen the truth about this ship, he probably would be brained before he could get near them.

Pacing up the deck, he heard a slight stir of voices from the hold, at a place where the strain of the great storm had opened a seam so that it still gaped wide. But that mild whispering of voices never would reach the ears of the commissioner. He went on past the galley, in time to see the cook run out with a kettle of steaming water and head aft towards the poop. More hot water for the captain's punch. He was not having to part with his precious Burgundy, after all, then. Sailors have the same strong tastes the world over, to be sure.

Falloner, looking into the galley, saw that the cook was making such strong preparations for the party that another kettle already was steaming and bubbling on the little stove. Falloner picked it off. He returned to that place where the deck opened, and, walking along the narrow gap of the seam, he poured a small, steady stream down into the hold as he stepped along.

Only a few cupfuls could have gone down into the hold, but as Falloner strode back to the galley and replaced the kettle on the stove he heard a tremendous screeching break out between decks.

Those who were not burned apparently were startled out of their wits by the sudden yells of their companions. And the entire hold of the Inverarry began to roar with frantic complaints. That explosion of noise ought to blow Captain Tenby's peace of mind sky-high.

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And it did!

In ten minutes the hatches were off, and the French commissioner was shining a lantern down the companion into a sea of dark faces and the whites of rolling eyes.

That sealed the fate of Captain Tenby.

The commissioner was a dry-faced, sour-looking little man. He turned to Tenby and said:

"I thank you again for your rum punch, captain. I see that you can afford to be hospitable."

TENBY, now that the blow had fallen, held his face perfectly. "I have been ambitious, gentlemen," he said. "And as our poet says, 'Ill-weaved ambition, how much art thou shrunk!' Well, my friends, many a man has fallen as low as jail from higher places than the poop of a South Sea trader.

"Shall we finish the rum punch, or will you have me in irons at once?"

"You talk well, captain," said Poupardin. His face was fat and round with bursting health. His eyes popped continually and his whiskers bristled upwards so that he perpetually had the surprised look of a cat. "You talk very smoothly and well," he said, "but by your leave, we will have you resting in irons for the remainder of this voyage. Where did you get them? Taholu? Well, part of my crew will sail your ship back to that port. You and your men—we'll have to find accommodation for you on the Arethuse, as we lead the way. You take note, Monsieur Delisle, that the captain has offered no resistance?"

The commissioner took note with a sour, silent smile.

Evil days for the captain were portended by that smile.

"I'd like to know," said Tenby, quietly, "who made the blackbirds sing?"

And here the cook howled out, "Him! I seen him carry a kettle of boiling water back into the galley, half empty—he'd poured some of it through the broken deck. Him! Him! Damn him!"

That was how Falloner was drawn into the foreground.

Tenby, regarding him bitterly, nevertheless said, "You see, Monsieur Delisle, that even a blackbirder is apt to carry one honest man. There has to be a pinch of salt in every bowl of porridge. Falloner, I forgot you. I was too busy to remember the most important point, eh? A tap on the head and a berth below would have taken care of you, I suppose. But—well, one slip brings a man down off the highest ladder."

The commissioner, facing Falloner, eyed him carefully.

"What brings you on board this ship?" he asked.

"A drugged glass of whisky in San Francisco," said Falloner.

"I think," said the dry-spoken commissioner, "that you have saved two Frenchmen from being made very great fools, and I thank you. Captain Poupardin will try to make you comfortable on the Arethuse, I'm sure. He owes you a debt of gratitude of his own."

YET it was not the dark, glowering looks of the crew of the Inverarry that weighted down the mind of Falloner when he lingered on the deck of the Arethuse, later that night, and watched the tall masts pointing out the stars.

He had saved some two hundred Taholans from a terrible existence. He

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had taken a complete and perfect revenge on Tenby. And yet he could not help telling himself that he had been, in some way, a traitor. A traitor to a bad cause, perhaps. And yet there was a cold weight still on his conscience.

The sea-wind blew the thought of it away, at last, and cleansed his mind. And his thought began to fly forward towards Taholu. The smoking heights would rise out of the sea again. They would pass the gleaming mouth of the harbor. And when would he issue from the port again?

It seemed to him that this return was an act of fate. He had fled from the bright island days and the soft island nights to get back into his own world. But once he was restored to the place, would he ever have the courage to leave it again? To the outer world he was a man wanted for murder. In Taholu he was a hero who had killed two tribal enemies.

He began to think of the smiling calm of the trader's daughter. There was about her a cool infinity, like the sea or the sky.

But the island was what mattered more than the people on it, for some reason.

It grew very late. The stars had changed on the wheel of the turning sky.

He was going back. He would see the blanched village that climbed the hill. He would again see Heavenly Face. What was there in the world like her? White skin or dark, where was there such beauty? And, also, he owed her his life.

He stretched out his hands and felt as though a treasure were in each. Only one could be his.

Then he saw again Heavenly Face as she had appeared riding high on the upraised hands of the crowd, laughing, swaying to a dancing rhythm, graceful as a bird on the wing.

He began to laugh.

CHAPTER XI.

KOPANA'S DECREE.

WHEN the Inverarry blew out of Taholu harbor with two hundred men of Taholu clapped safely under hatches, two or three score canoes started in pursuit, and the tall cliffs towards the seaward side of the bay rang mournfully with the howling of the warriors. The women on the little island where the Inverarry had been careened kept up the lament so that it echoed to the white-thatched town on the hill, and every inhabitant left in the place began to mourn at the top of his lungs even when he had not the slightest idea of what the trouble might be. So the dogs of an entire neighborhood took up the baying of one unhappy watcher of the moon.

That continual cry diminished a little when some of the larger canoes and several big outriggers under sail and paddle power shot out of sight through the harbor mouth; but when the full sea wind struck the Inverarry and swelled all the hollow white caverns of her canvas, she ran swiftly away from the wildest hope of pursuit.

Then the outriggers and the other canoes returned slowly, and the weird noise of mourning drifted back and forth through the bay, between the village and the cliffs.

It had reached the ears of the great king, Kopana, and the word had been given to "the sitting king" that the ship of the white men had sailed away with two hundred of his best warriors. Even that was nothing. The terrible truth was that the only two

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sons of Kopana had been carried away by the blackbirder.

In the meantime, as the sounds of mourning drew all together towards the village, and then towards the house of "the sitting king," a deputation of warriors dispatched by Kopana went to the house of the only white trader who ever had been allowed to live on the island of Taholu.

PENELOPE CAMPBELL watched the big warriors coming, and knew what it meant. She ran into her father's office where he sat at his great ledger making the entries of the morning's business, for every day something or other was brought to his warehouse and something was delivered from it.

"The Inverarry has sailed away with a whole crowd of Taholans under the hatches!" the girl told her father.

"That's the cause of all this caterwauling, is it?" asked the trader.

"And a dozen of Kopana's men are coming towards our house now!" she cried.

"Ah, are they?" said Campbell, and he stood up.

A pale riot of terror ran into her face, into her eyes.

"Tell them that you and the men of that ship are not *vasu!*" she pleaded. "Don't let them take you, father. . . . The blackbirders—they caught the two sons of Kopana! The two sons of the king are gone!"

"Why, then, I suppose that some one has to pay," murmured the trader.

A wordless cry of terror came from her.

Campbell looked her straight in the eye, sternly.

"You're going to be steady, my dear, aren't you?" he asked her.

"Yes—I'll be steady," she answered.

He watched her fight down the panic; he kept on watching until she smiled a bit for him.

"Find that new sun-helmet for me, will you, Penelope?" he asked.

When she hurried away he lifted his eyes for an instant to the rack of fine rifles that stood against the wall. But they would not help him. He had native servants who would fight for him till they dropped, but nothing could keep out the spear-rush of the Taholans, he knew. Besides, if things had to end in this way, he preferred not to lift his hand against these big, brown, childish islanders. They never had had harm from him during the long years of his stay; and now the story should not be spoiled by a bad ending.

When he went to the hall he could see through the open door the warriors coming up the long path of the garden, and beyond them was the blue flash of the bay. This was the scene which had consoled him a thousand times for his exile from the world of his own people.

It consoled him now for whatever was to come.

Penelope brought him the new sun-helmet, freshly pipe-clayed. He looked critically down the crease of his white trousers, down the smoothness of the linen sleeves of his coat while he listened to the rattle of talk which one of his panting house-boys poured out. Campbell cut into the chatter with one question.

"What about Falloner? What about the other white man? The one who killed the two Haggari from the hills?"

Falloner, said the native boy, had been struck down on the deck of the

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Inverarry as the ship slipped away under sail.

"Ah?" said Campbell. "He was too honest for the rest of that crew, I suppose. Well, Penelope, I wish I had him here to look after you while I'm—in this spot of trouble."

"You think Kopana will hold you?" said the girl, speaking very low to keep the tremor out of her voice.

"I think he will—one way or another," answered Campbell. "I don't know why my mind dwells so on Falloner."

"Except for him, there never would have been any trouble!" cried the girl. "It was he who won the confidence of Malakola and all the people. Except for him, the natives never would have let Captain Tenby careen the Inverarry and patch her up. She would have stayed in the harbor till she starved—or put to sea and sunk!"

"Don't reproach Falloner," said her father. "The truth of it is, Penelope, that he could hardly drag himself away from Taholu—after he'd seen you. . . . Now, give me my stick, will you? And kiss me, my dear. This will all come out well enough. And whatever happens to me, remember that you will be safe. You're taboo to every man on the island, except the Haggari animals in the hills. Remember, at the last, that the company's ship will be calling here inside of six months. And keep your head high, as a Campbell ought to."

"I'll remember," said the girl.

He allowed himself one last look at her. She was the masterwork of his life—his gift to the world. And she proved it now by smiling at him as he walked out of the house with his walking stick a-swing, and so straight into the midst of the warriors from Kopana.

They closed about him in a living, moving hedge, the blades of their spears glittering. Behind him he could tell, by the thumping of the feet, that the rearward men of the guard were prancing. No doubt they were making silent gestures at him with their lances, and that was why the people of the village, as he went by, stopped their wailing for the lost ones to stare at the procession.

For Campbell had been the greatest man on the island, next to the king. There was hardly a family in Taholu that he had not doctored. A crowd of them, half frightened, half mischievously curious, followed him to the house of the king with its long walls of golden bamboo and its thatch of snowy white.

WHEN he entered he found Kopana seated cross-legged, a three-hundred-pound pyramid of flesh now faded almost white by living and perspiring so constantly in the shade. The weight of his flesh kept him nearly always in the house, and that was how he had gained the title of "the sitting king."

About the fire a score of pots were simmering from the early morning until midnight, for several kinds of fish, pork, turtle, breadfruit, yams, shredded coconut, or the milk from the compressed fibers, and many other island delicacies were constantly in preparation for the diet of the king. Even as the trader entered, there was an outbreak of handclapping from the women in the big house, a token that the appetite of the monarch had been again sufficed. Every hour he took a few mouthfuls.

The wailing that had been interrupted by the handclapping began again, like a special, mournful greeting for Angus Campbell. But here the king

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raised a hand, and the long room fell silent instantly.

An older wife plied a fan to keep Kopana cool; his youngest and prettiest wife kneeled just behind his shoulder and with a clean bit of cloth every moment or two rubbed away the perspiration which kept forming on his upper lip or on the thick flesh of his forehead, which bulged like the frowning brow of a lion.

But he was a mild king, eminently good, just and kind. As a young man, Campbell had known him to fight like a hero, driving back the savage Haggari into their strongholds; but afterwards he became "the sitting king." Even the grossness of his flesh could not quite swallow up the regularity of his features.

As Campbell entered, a golden flash of beauty sprang up from a corner and ran to him. It was the king's daughter, Lavia Laia, red-eyed with weeping for her brothers but now ready to forget her grief for a moment in order to stand by a friend.

She laid her hand on the arm of Campbell and smiled up at him; and for the first time he felt that he might have a ghost of a chance for life. Until that moment he had been able to see little in the royal house except the pair of wide-shouldered stalwarts who leaned on their great war clubs behind Kopana.

Kopana's talk was simple and to the point.

"I have loved you for a long time," he said, "but now you have let your people carry away my two sons."

"I had nothing to do with it," said Campbell.

"Their skins are white. Your skin is white. You are all one people, and they have stolen Sahi and Nito away from me," said Kopana. "Therefore you must die." He added, "Lavia Laia, stand away from him. He is about to die."

HE lifted a finger, and the two clubmen stepped forward with the big weapons raised. Lavia Laia glided in front of Campbell and pressed her body back against his breast. One of her upthrown arms passed over his head.

"Go away from him, Lavia Laia!" commanded Kopana.

"I never shall go!" cried the girl. "And if you let his blood come on me, it will break my heart and kill me!"

"You are not a friend to me," said the king to Campbell, "or you would push her away from you."

"Kopana," said Campbell, "the Haggari and the Taholans have skins of the same color. Are you responsible for the things they steal and the heads they cut off?"

"You always can talk until my brain aches. I don't want to think any more about this," said Kopana. "I have made a judgment, and it is a good judgment. Now you want to make me argue. That is not just. Lavia Laia, step away from him."

"I shall not move!" said the girl.

"Drag her away!" commanded the king.

The two warriors stretched out their hands to obey.

"Haggari pigs! Motherless, rat-faced, filthy, mangy pigs!" cried the girl. "Do you dare to touch the daughter of Kopana?"

They drew back a little. One of them said plaintively to Kopana, "She is your daughter. My hand does not want to touch her."

"Oh, Lavia Laia," said the king, "what a great world of trouble you bring to your father. Do I have to

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stand up myself and drag you away from the white man?"

"His daughter is my friend," said the girl. "If you kill him, she will die; if she dies, I shall die on her grave; and then my ghost will blow like a chilly wind down your back every night, and you will have cramps in your stomach."

The king laid his hand on his immense paunch.

"Cramps in the stomach are very bad," he said.

"And then I would not have you to give me medicine." The last words were to Campbell.

"How do you know that Sahi and Nito will not come back?" asked the girl. "Keep this man with you until a whole moon has passed. If Sahi and Nito have not come back by that time, then of course you may have him clubbed."

"Good!" said Kopana. "That is an excellent thought. I shall have thirty days to talk with him; and what is happier than to talk with such a wise and good man? Only, you will not argue? You will only talk and tell me stories, and listen to mine?"

"Yes," said Campbell.

"These shall be the happiest thirty days of my life," said Kopana. "And I shall make *you* so happy that at the end of the thirty days you will not care a great deal if you have to die! Food! Food! And bring some kava for my friend. Sit down now, and tell me about the great canoe again, the great iron canoe that you once saw. Let all the wailing in the town be stopped. It is not right that my people should mourn when I am happy. Besides, I have some of the hair of Nito and Sahi, and it shall be given to the wizard to make my sons come home."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

How Large Is Man?

MAN is about halfway in mass between the atom and the star. Ten of the incredibly small atoms raised to the 27th power represent the mass of an average human; ten humans raised to the 28th power would be about the mass of the average star!

Our earth weighs in tons 5,997 followed by 21 ciphers (five thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven million, million, million tons).

The entire living population of Earth does not weigh one four-hundred-billionth part of our tellurian globe!

—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*

Record Robbery

SEVERAL years ago it was found that a brewer had tapped one of New York's four-foot water mains and stolen enough water to fill a good-sized lake. One of the penalties for theft of a million gallons a day was a fine of one million dollars.

—*J. W. Holden.*

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Men of Mine
POLAR NAVIGATOR
BEST KNOWN AS THE MAN WHO CHARTED THE GREAT ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO FOR CANADA CAPTAIN JOSEPH E. BERNIER STEAMED MORE MILES THROUGH NORTH POLAR SEAS THAN ANY OTHER SKIPPER OF HIS TIME. HE WAS 66 YEARS AT SEA AND MADE SOME 270 VOYAGES—13 OF THEM TO THE ARCTIC.
CAPTAIN J.E. Bernier
BORN AT L'ISLET, QUEBEC, JAN. 1, 1852 HE CAME OF A SEA-FARING FAMILY. FOR OVER A CENTURY HIS FATHER AND HIS GRANDFATHER SAILED SHIPS OUT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE RIVER. AT 13, BERNIER SAILED AS AN APPRENTICE BEFORE THE MAST, TAKING ALL THE KNOCKS THAT WERE THE LOT OF SHIPS BOYS AT THAT TIME.
BECOMING A SALES-MAN FOR HIS FATHER'S SHIP-YARDS, YOUNG BERNIER SAILED FAST CLIPPERS TO BRITAIN, WHERE THE TRIG CRAFT WERE IN DEMAND. HE FIRST COMMANDED A SHIP IN 1870, AT 17, WHEN HE TOOK THE "QUORN" FROM GREENOCK, SCOTLAND, TO PENSACOLA, FLA. HEAVY SEAS BATTERED THE SHIP AND OPENED HER SEAMS. THE YOUNG SKIPPER SHIFTED THE BALLAST TO LIST THE SHIP, PUTTING THE LEAKS ABOVE THE WATERLINE. THEN HE TOOK TURNS WITH THE CARPENTER IN GOING OVER THE SIDE TO POUND OAKUM INTO THE SEAMS.

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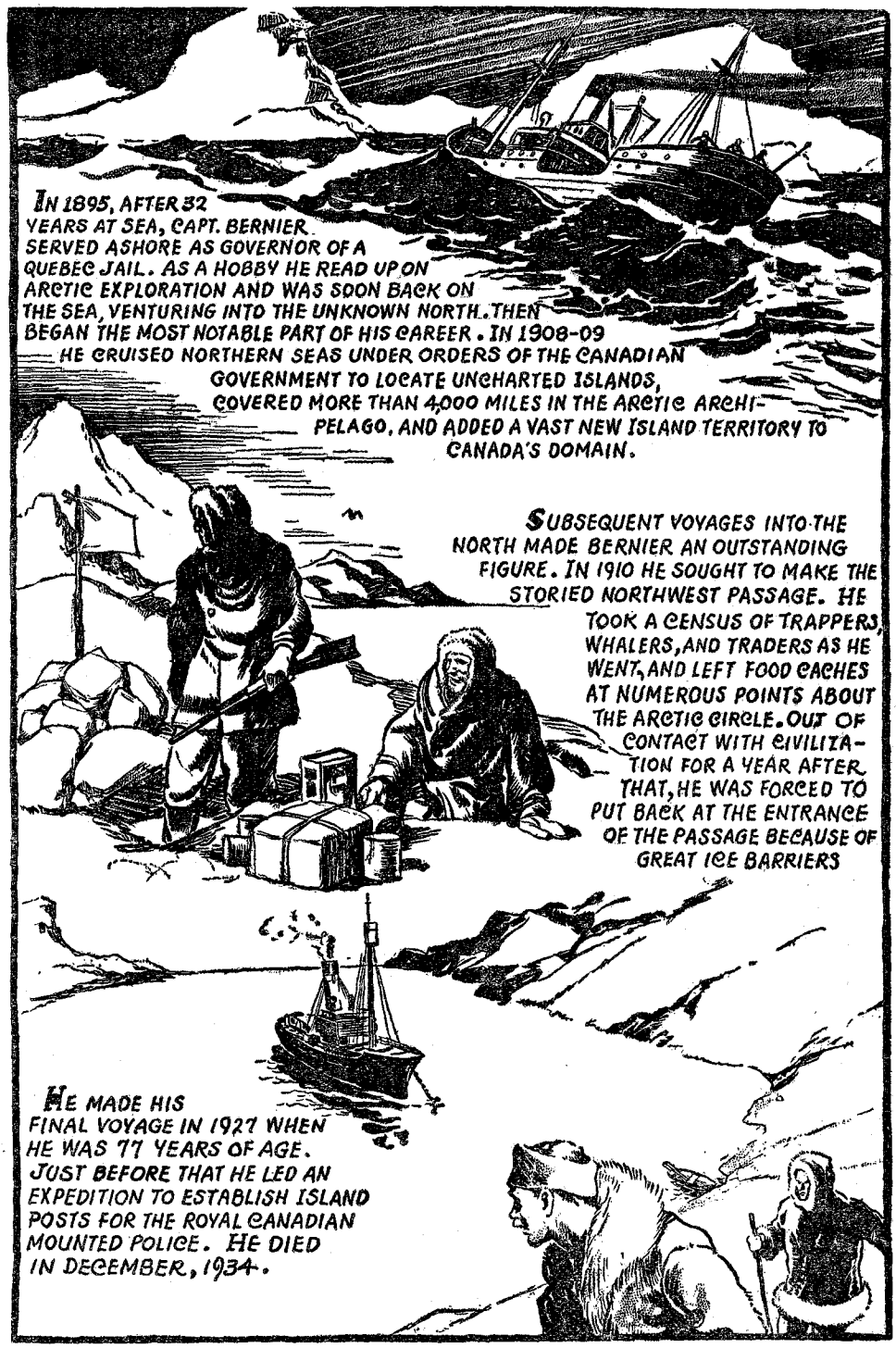
IN 1895, AFTER 32 YEARS AT SEA, CAPT. BERNIER SERVED ASHORE AS GOVERNOR OF A QUEBEC JAIL. AS A HOBBY HE READ UP ON ARCTIC EXPLORATION AND WAS SOON BACK ON THE SEA, VENTURING INTO THE UNKNOWN NORTH. THEN BEGAN THE MOST NOTABLE PART OF HIS CAREER. IN 1908-09 HE CRUISED NORTHERN SEAS UNDER ORDERS OF THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT TO LOCATE UNCHARTED ISLANDS, COVERED MORE THAN 4,000 MILES IN THE ARCTIC ARCHIPELAGO, AND ADDED A VAST NEW ISLAND TERRITORY TO CANADA'S DOMAIN.
SUBSEQUENT VOYAGES INTO THE NORTH MADE BERNIER AN OUTSTANDING FIGURE. IN 1910 HE SOUGHT TO MAKE THE STORIED NORTHWEST PASSAGE. HE TOOK A CENSUS OF TRAPPERS, WHALERS, AND TRADERS AS HE WENT, AND LEFT FOOD CACHES AT NUMEROUS POINTS ABOUT THE ARCTIC CIRCLE. OUT OF CONTACT WITH CIVILIZATION FOR A YEAR AFTER THAT, HE WAS FORCED TO PUT BACK AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE PASSAGE BECAUSE OF GREAT ICE BARRIERS
HE MADE HIS FINAL VOYAGE IN 1927 WHEN HE WAS 77 YEARS OF AGE. JUST BEFORE THAT HE LED AN EXPEDITION TO ESTABLISH ISLAND POSTS FOR THE ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE. HE DIED IN DECEMBER, 1934.

Next Week: Col. E. W. Starling, Protector of Presidents

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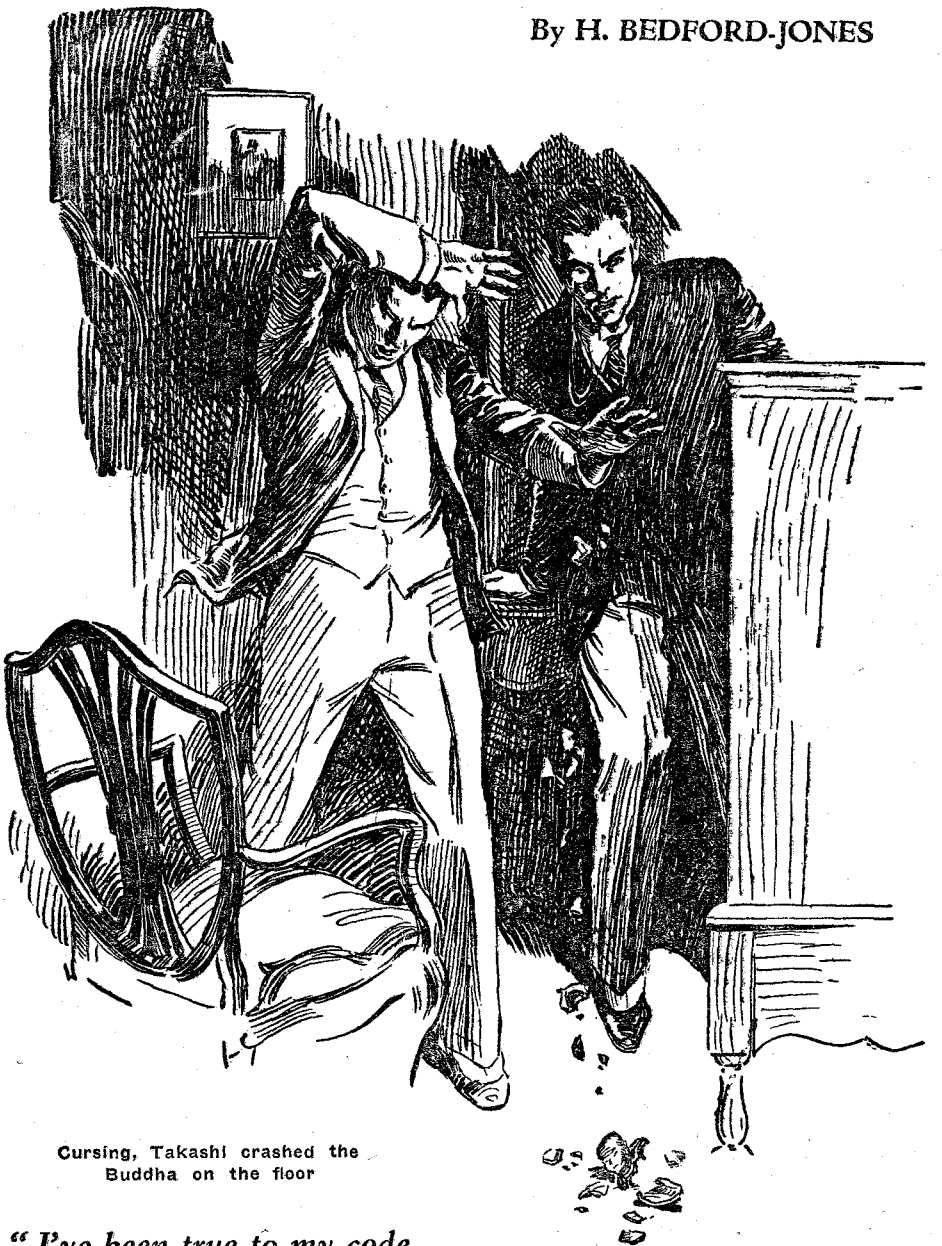
Riley Dillon, Masquerader

By H. BEDFORD-JONES



Cursing, Takashi crashed the Buddha on the floor

"I've been true to my code, never betrayed myself or my honor, and yet—what am I? Simply a thief." So Riley Dillon judged himself

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

RILEY DILLON, the light-fingered, had one ruling passion—the collection of precious jewels. He loved them as a connoisseur loves rare wine.

This story began in the Argosy for July 13

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However, he could see no reason why he should pay for them, so he merely "borrowed" them from their owners.

It was a quest for certain pearls and a ring done by Cellini that took him to San Francisco.

He also went there to meet his brother, Robert Dillon, who was returning from the Orient, a very sick man.

Robert Dillon died in his hotel room, and without wishing to do so, Riley Dillon found himself masquerading as his brother. A Japanese secret agent, Mr. Takashi, mistook Riley for Robert, and asked his help in securing a small turquoise Buddha which contained secrets valuable to Takashi. This Buddha was in the possession of Jane Hartly, young and rich and beautiful. She also owned the pearls Dillon sought, but when he saw her, he abandoned all thought of stealing from her.

Instead he determined to help her fight her unscrupulous former husband, Alec Hartly, who was trying to blackmail her. In league with Hartly was Roger Vincent, an old enemy of Robert Dillon's, and Shark Harrison, a San Francisco petty criminal.

Riley Dillon learned that his brother had unwittingly smuggled into the country a valuable collection of jade for a man named Montague.

CHAPTER VI *(Continued)*.

THE BLACKMAILER.

LEAVING the box at the porter's desk for Mr. Montague, Dillon selected a lobby chair which gave him the view he desired, and was partly hidden by one of the black marble pillars.

Barely was he in place when he caught sight of Potiphar crossing the lobby, and called to him.

"Hello!" said Potiphar, coming up. "What—"

"Draw up a chair and sit you down, and keep your mouth shut," cut in Dillon blithely. "When I tell you to watch, watch!"

After one sharp look, Potiphar obeyed. He lit a cigarette and kept quiet. A few moments passed; then Dillon leaned forward.

"Now! The chap going to the porter's desk."

A brawny man in raincoat and slouch hat had appeared there. A man whose massive jaw and beard of jet black, his great size, his heavy walk, would have marked him out among a thousand.

He glanced cautiously around, and after making his inquiry was handed the package. Immediately he jerked away the paper, saw the box, thrust it into his pocket, and strode out of the hotel.

"Well, you saw him," said Dillon, relaxing, and turned to the detective. "And do you know him?"

Potiphar solemnly polished his spectacles with a silk handkerchief. "There are possibly three or four persons in town with whom I'm not acquainted, Mr. Dillon. Is there any reason why I should know that man?"

"Several, but let 'em go," and with a chuckle Dillon rose. "Want to go upstairs?"

"Haven't time to stay, thanks," said Potiphar. "By the way, I brought along that kit of tools you lent me. The one belonging to Shark Harrison. Just as well not to do anything about finding them, Mr. Dillon; that fellow is a pretty bad character, and I understand he's got a bit of political influence."

From his pocket he drew out the tool-kit, neatly wrapped and tied.

Dillon nodded and dropped it beside his chair.

"So Hartly made no trouble tonight?"

"Not a bit. Man, how she handled him! It was marvelous. I could have

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sworn she was scared stiff. When he left, my men trailed him without the least trouble. Do you want him shadowed or not?"

"Yes. Where is he?"

Potiphar grinned. "In room 765, upstairs."

"What?" Dillon's gray eyes widened. "Here?"

"Here."

"Splendid! Splendid!" Dillon threw back his head in a quick, eager laugh. "Faith, it couldn't be better! I suppose you got a record of the conversation tonight?"

"A perfect one." The other sobered. "It doesn't look so good."

"True for you. I expect it doesn't. How much does he demand?"

"Twenty thousand. He was willing enough to take a check."

"Proving that he'd no intention of giving up his hold on her, eh? Very well. I figure he'll leave here a trifle before ten in the morning. Have him shadowed. The minute he leaves the hotel, have your man ring my room. You'd best be up at Mrs. Hartly's house yourself, in case he's tempted to make any trouble there. I'll be along to settle him, shortly after ten."

Potiphar cleared his throat. "If I might advise, the district attorney—"

"Has nothing to do with the case, tra-la," Dillon said gayly.

The other shrugged and took his departure.

DILLON took up the little parcel. He crossed to the news stand and got the evening papers, then ascended to his room. The wrapped tool-kit he put in the bottom dresser drawer, then turned in to read his papers. But his mind ran on the astonishing information which the evening had brought him.

Vincent! His brother had warned him against that man; his own brain had warned him, at their meeting. Vincent and Hartly, playing the game together, Shark Harrison a mere tool for them. Hartly, perhaps, was a mere tool also; the fellow was venomous, a petty rascal behind whom loomed the more dangerous Vincent.

And somewhere, Montague was linked up with Vincent—perhaps from the latter's days in the Orient. That Montague was the murderer of Count Yoritomo was probable; his major connection with the crime was certain. A man of such pronounced looks and character, if once under suspicion, could never hope to get out of Japan with those jades.

Therefore, he had very neatly worked Robert Dillon—his own words explained the whole affair. And now he would have to smash the box in order to learn that he had lost the jades.

"And that, begad, is his worry, and not mine!" thought Riley Dillon with a chuckle, as he switched off his reading light.

With morning, Dillon wakened to bright sunlight, a good omen. At eight he descended to breakfast. At eight twenty-five he showed up at the desk with the whimsical complaint that both his keys were locked in his room.

"I'll send the bellman along with the emergency key, Mr. Dillon," said the clerk, and suited action to words.

While the bellman admitted him, Dillon wet with his tongue the inside of his left wrist—a spot which will retain an impression for a number of minutes. Borrowing the passkey from the bellman, he remarked upon the miracles of locksmiths which could make one key that would open any door in the house.

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His slim fingers were deft and swift. He drew the other's attention to the fact that his steam radiator did not work; in the moment that the bellman was occupied, Dillon pressed the emergency key firmly into the skin of his wrist.

Next moment the boy departed, and Dillon fell to work.

He had the impression he needed. From his grip he produced a fountain pen which, instead of ink, screwed apart to reveal a metal shank and a dozen tiny, glittering bits of metal which could be fitted together in any fashion or shape desired. This very useful adjunct to his profession, which Dillon had invented but never patented, yielded in the space of a few moments the blank key which he now needed. He went to work on this with a kit of instruments from his trunk.

WITHIN thirty minutes he had a key which not only fitted his own door, but would fit any other door in the hotel—presumably. Upon this presumption, Riley Dillon was gambling. His own room was on the sixth floor; that of Alec Hartly was one flight above; the stairway was well distant from the elevators.

His telephone rang; he answered, and the voice of Takashi greeted him.

"Good morning, Mr. Dillon. Have you any hopes for me?"

"Every hope," said Dillon cheerfully. "I have the thing here. I'm devilish busy this morning, though; can you come over here, say, at two o'clock?"

"Ah, you perform miracles, my friend!" was the response. "At two o'clock."

Riley Dillon trimmed and lighted a Havana with complacent satisfaction. Today promised to clear away his perplexities. The matter of the turquoise Buddha was as good as settled, and that of the jades likewise. This morning would see Hartly removed from any further action and his vicious teeth pulled.

The only question now remaining was why Vincent was after the Buddha—perhaps to sell to Takashi. That was unimportant.

Yes, with afternoon the slate would be very neatly cleaned. There remained Jane Hartly, and at thought of her Dillon felt an inward glow. What a woman she was!

The telephone broke into his reflections once more. This time it was Potiphar's man, using the house telephone downstairs.

"Mr. Dillon? Our friend just left. Took a taxicab."

"Thanks. That's all, then."

Dillon glanced at his watch. Nine thirty-five; obviously, Hartly meant to reach the appointment without any chance of being late.

Once in the hall, Dillon headed for the stairway, and gained the seventh floor without incident. The corridor there was empty. As he approached 765, he saw the maid's wagon three doors beyond; luckily, she was in a room, out of sight. With an air of complete possession, Riley Dillon knocked lightly at Hartly's door. No response. He inserted his manufactured key in the lock and pressed it gently. Upon this key hung all his very simple plan. The lock did not give.

Dillon felt beads of sweat start on his brow. He tried again and yet again. Only at the third effort did the key work. The lock turned, the door opened to his hand. He stepped i n s i d e and sprang the night latch as he closed the door.

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The first glance showed him an empty room. Now his gray eyes flitted swiftly about the place in appraisal.

Hartly would not chance keeping those ledgers on his person, quite obviously; they would be too large. He must leave them here. There was no trunk in sight, but on the grip rack stood a large pigskin bag. There was the place.

Dillon examined the bag; it was closed and locked. An excellent bit of leather, with the usual standard lock. Dillon fell to work; a scant three minutes of deft labor, and the lock was picked.

The bag came open.

Two old leather ledgers—there, under his hand. Dillon drew them out, glanced into them; they were the ones he sought. He laid them aside, and was in the act of closing the bag again when he suddenly checked himself. It was not the whisky that caught his eye, nor the automatic pistol beside the bottle. It was his own name, leaping up at him. A folded telegram lay there in the bag; his own name fairly jumped at his eye. Incredulous, he reached down, picked it up, glanced at it.

For an instant his blood chilled.

Then, abruptly, he thrust the missive into his pocket, closed the bag, picked up the ledgers, and walked out of the room. He paid no heed to whether any one observed him; his sense of caution was destroyed. His gay, cheerful manner was blasted, his gray eyes were cold and chill.

ONCE in his own room again, he caught up hat and stick and hurriedly departed. Not until he was in the taxicab, speeding out toward the Presidio, did he draw out the telegram and read it more carefully. It was addressed to Hartly at the St. Francis, and had been sent from New York late the previous night; it must have just been delivered before Hartly departed. Dillon calculated swiftly. Hartly had met him only the previous morning in the bookshop. Ah, of course! Like a fool, he had mentioned his name. Then there was Vincent to consider; no doubt Hartly had consulted him. And here was the answer:

> Full name Riley Dillon. Residing Waldorf past six months; before then Drake Chicago Stop Supposedly retired lawyer Stop Little known about him except repeatedly mentioned in connection with cases involving jewels but never under any suspicion and no record Stop Bachelor about thirty presumably wealthy Stop Typical confidence man no background is suspicious Stop Highly regarded at Waldorf. BAGLEY.

The words burned. Riley Dillon felt a slow constriction of the heart as he perused them. Bagley? Some private investigator, no doubt.

Suddenly the reality of his career flashed across his mind; self-deception was flung aside. No background—damning words! Fool that he was, to think he could forever keep secret the ruling passion of his life! Repeatedly mentioned—that was enough to indicate suspicion. Typical confidence man—was this true? And he had flattered himself into believing that, because he had ever held aloof from actual suspicion, from anything incriminating, he was free of it all.

Free? Never. The Cellini ring in his pocket, the jewels in their deposit-box at the Waldorf, were chains around him. Every one of these things, these glittering baubles that he so loved, gripped him with intangible bonds that affected his life, his character, all that he was or would be, and held his future in pawn.

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He leaned forward, tapped on the glass.

"Do we pass a telegraph office? Then stop at it for a moment."

Five minutes later the cab swung in and halted at the curb. Impulsive as ever, Riley Dillon entered the telegraph office and laid down the night letter.

"Can you send a reply to this message? I don't know the address—"

"Not necessary, sir. Certainly."

Dillon scribbled swiftly, addressing his wire to the unknown Bagley:

> Upon application will gladly furnish full background and all details desired. Suggest you apply direct for what you want St. Francis Hotel. RILEY DILLON.

He paid for the message, reëntered the taxicab, and was again sweeping on his way—perhaps three minutes lost. A grim smile touched his lips.

"There! That'll give him a jolt, begad! And now for Hartly. Too bad I can't take this matter up with him; but for the present Jane comes first."

None the less, the acute sense of shock remained with him.

HE gave no evidence of it when Ming Yen ushered him into the house. Ming had his orders, evidently; in silence he greeted Riley Dillon and gestured.

Dillon obeyed and walked into the rather oppressive drawing-room, where Jane Hartly rose swiftly to meet him.

"Oh, Mr. Dillon! Good morning. May I introduce Mr. Hartly?"

"The top of the morning to you, and yourself looking like a rose with the first dew on her petals!" exclaimed Riley Dillon blithely as he shook hands. Then he turned. "Oh, Mr. Hartly, is it? And how's your health this morning, me lad?"

Hartly had risen. His hot blue eyes narrowed on Dillon.

"You again, eh? Our fine gentleman from nowhere. More of your interference?"

"Ain't he a devil for questions, now?" said Dillon. "I've a surprise for you, Hartly. We've a dictaphone record of your talk last night, and witnesses to boot. I say, Potiphar! Anywhere around?"

"Here, sir," and Potiphar appeared from the adjoining room.

Hartly started, then swung around furiously.

"Jane, what d'you mean by this? If you've dared to trick me—"

"Tut, tut! What did I tell you yesterday about speaking with a lady?" intervened Dillon. "We've got you nipped by the neck, me lad. If you ever show your face to this lady again, up you go on an extortion charge, and long years in jail ahead of you."

Hartly rapped an oath at him, and looked at Jane, his eyes blazing.

"All right, my fine lady. Now the whole thing goes to the government men and to the newspapers, and we'll see—"

He checked himself abruptly. Dillon had taken from beneath his arm the two ledgers, laying them carelessly on the table.

Hartly froze for an instant; a rush of blood came into his face, then ebbed away.

"What— Where did those come from?"

Riley Dillon put up his monocle and transfixed Hartly with a steady stare. "Why, perhaps from your friend Shark Harrison, me lad. Perhaps from your friend Roger Vincent — who knows? Now, get out of here, and quick about it." His voice bit curtly, lashed the man with its scorn. "Out,

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you blackguard, or you'll be flung out!"

LIVID, Hartly stared at him for a long moment, the passionate face in a torment of indecision, of uncertainty. Then he flushed again, caught up his hat, and went striding from the room without another word.

"Mind the warning!" Dillon called after him—then turned with a laugh as the girl caught him by the arm. The front door slammed.

"Oh, how did you do it? How did you get them?" she cried out, her dark eyes like blazing stars. "Tell me at once!"

"Faith, I didn't ask, my dear! It was Potiphar's man got 'em, ye see," and Dillon gave the astonished Potiphar a whimsical glance. "No use asking a man of his profession anything, begad; all you can do is send him a check when he presents his bill, and be thankful—"

"Don't you dare lie to me!" cried Jane Hartly, half angrily. She had caught the bewildered expression of Potiphar. "I demand that you tell me how you got those books!"

Dillon shrugged. "The reaction is negative, my dear. I'll tell you on one condition, and one only."

"Very well. What is it?"

"That you dine with me tonight."

She searched his face for an instant. "On one further condition; that you dine with me here, then we can go out and dance, drink, whirl over the beach, do any wild and lovely thing you like! Agreed?"

"Agreed," said Riley Dillon, beaming. "At what time?"

"Ming Yen will serve dinner at seven. Come when you like."

"Then I must be off. Potiphar, my cab's waiting; we can go together." Dillon took her hand and bowed over it gravely, touched his lips to her fingers, looked into her eyes for a moment, his gay smile gone. "Good-by, my dear, until tonight. We'll celebrate a number of things, you and I; we'll meet again to part again—more's the pity. Coming, Potiphar?"

And he passed out to the entrance, leaving her looking after him in perplexed surmise.

Potiphar joined him. Together they got into the waiting taxicab.

"WELL," said Potiphar, with a sigh, "I suppose questions are no go?"

"Devil a one," rejoined Riley Dillon.

"Do I send my bill for this job to you?"

"No. Bill me only for the work you do for me. And I want another miracle done by wire. Find out from New York whatever you can about a man named Bagley, who seems to be in your business there. Philp might inform you—"

"No need, thanks," Potiphar replied. "The Bagley agency is well known by reputation. Hiram X. Bagley, it is. He used to be a government man and got fired for grafting, and went into the business in Los Angeles. It was so soft that he moved to New York to work the sucker trade."

"Hm! You appear to love him."

"Absolutely. He's the worst double crossing rat in the business which Lord knows is full of them! Divorce, blackmail, anything dirty that comes to his hand. But he's a damned good sleuth. If you want anything on anybody, he can get it—or make it up."

"This fellow Hartly comes from Los Angeles, too?"

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"Yes. Went back there after the lady divorced him; he's quite a swell in certain circles there and has Hollywood interests."

"He might know Bagley, then, eh?"

"Easily." Potiphar surveyed Riley Dillon's profile shrewdly. "Don't make any mistake; Hartly's dangerous. I think we've got him gripped; but he's dangerous just the same. Shall I keep that evidence filed away?"

Dillon nodded. "And let me have my own bill at your convenience. For the moment, I've nothing more to throw your way."

At the St. Francis, Dillon alighted. With a nod to the doorman, he strode into the hotel and across the lobby to the desk. He got his key and turned toward the elevators. As he did so, two men intercepted him.

He halted; he instantly knew what they were.

"Mr. Dillon?" said one quietly. "You might take a look at this."

Dillon accepted the open wallet and looked at the identity card displayed. "Mr. Sunderland, eh? From the district attorney's office, I see," he observed coolly. "Well, gentlemen?"

"Perhaps we might speak with you in your room?" said Sunderland. "Unless you want to have it out here."

Dillon nodded. Right. Come along, me lads."

None of the three spoke again until they left the elevator and walked down the corridor.

Dillon's shoulders sagged a little; that telegram had given him a bad jolt, and now, almost for the first time in his life, he feared what might be coming. That trunk of his held many things, not to mention jades—but the jades, he remembered, now reposed in his dresser drawer.

When he opened the door of his room, however, he was smiling and debonair as ever. The two men followed him inside. Sunderland came forward, the other remained by the door. Dillon tossed his hat and stick on the bed, and turned.

"At your service, gentlemen. What's it all about?"

"I've a warrant here for your arrest, Dillon, on suspicion of possessing stolen property—"

"Suspicion, is it?" Dillon broke into a short laugh. "Faith, that's a new one! Can any one be arrested on suspicion?"

"Under California law, yes," returned Sunderland calmly.

Riley Dillon's gray eyes twinkled. "And what is it ye suspect me of stealing, then? The Ferry Building?"

"This is no joking matter, Dillon. We've also a search warrant here, and we mean to search your room. We've been informed that you're in possession of certain jades for which a Japanese nobleman was murdered. I'm bound to tell you that whatever you say may be used against you; there may be a murder charge behind it, as you probably know. You're under arrest."

CHAPTER VII.

COMMON THIEF.

RILEY DILLON produced cigarettes, lit one, and regarded Detective Sunderland calmly. He gave not the least indication of the abrupt flop his heart had taken at those words.

"I'm still rather incredulous about the whole thing, gentlemen," he observed. "You are no doubt aware that false arrest is an extremely serious matter—more so for the district attorney's office than for the police depart-

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ment. I'm even in some doubt as to whether undercover men for the D. A. are empowered to make arrests."

"We'll soon set your doubts to sleep," said Sunderland with asperity. "Don't come that stuff on us, Dillon. You're too intelligent."

Riley Dillon shrugged lightly.

"You've said you had a warrant," he rejoined. "Likewise a search warrant, eh? Suppose, for a moment, I stand on my alleged Constitutional rights, gentlemen."

"You're not an American citizen, Dillon."

"So? Will you make a little bet on that point?" Dillon's eyes twinkled. So friendly was his air, so charming was his manner, that even the grim intentness of Sunderland thawed a trifle. "Say, I'll give odds of ten to one."

"What are you trying to do—talk us out of it?"

"Devil a bit. This is a serious matter, as you observed. I've been a naturalized citizen for the past five years," said Dillon crisply. "Come, let's be having a look at your warrants. I don't doubt you have them, but I'd like to see them."

Sunderland turned to his companion. "Cough up, Jim."

Jim coughed up promptly. Dillon took the papers handed him and inspected them. He started slightly, then a touch of the old whimsical light came back into his face, and he returned the papers.

"Mr. Sunderland," he said, "will you let me call the hotel manager up here for a moment?"

"Sure," said the other grimly. "If you want publicity on this thing, you'll get your fill of it."

Dillon nodded and stepped to the telephone. He got the manager at once, and that gentleman, upon Dillon's plea of urgency, promised to be up immediately. Dillon produced a box of his choice Havanas and proffered them.

"Made especially for me, gentlemen," he said cheerily. "As this affair is going to end among friends and no hard feelings, we may as well be graceful about it. But I warn you, don't burn those cigars when you light 'em! To overheat a cigar ruins the aroma and is the most decided mark of a tasteless brute."

"What do you think you are going to pull, anyhow?" asked Sunderland.

"My dear chap, I always prefer a man's friendship to his resentment," and Riley Dillon beamed. "I could let you make a fool of yourself, and perhaps institute suit against you and so forth. I choose not to do so. Ah, here we are!"

A knock, and he admitted the manager, then closed the door.

"These gentlemen," he said, after introducing his visitors, "are from the district attorney's office. They have the proper intentions and the proper papers for the arrest of one Robert Dillon. I wish you'd tell them what you know about me."

"Come, come, Dillon!" broke out Sunderland angrily. "This sort of thing won't go down. We know you're Robert Dillon."

"Gentlemen!" intervened the manager quietly. "You're making a mistake. This is Mr. Riley Dillon of New York. He came here direct from New York; I have downstairs a wire from the Waldorf, where he has lived for the past six months, vouching for him in very decided terms."

THERE was a moment of utter consternation on the part of Sunderland. Riley Dillon laid out his passport, his naturalization certificate,

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and other papers which fully established his identity.

Sunderland glanced at them, then looked up.

"O. K.," he said. "You're not Robert Dillon; you win. What about him? Has he ever been registered here?"

Dillon nodded. "He was my brother. He arrived the evening after I did; he died a few hours after getting here. There's nothing to conceal in regard to him."

The hotel manager, questioned, laid bare the situation.

"Now let me have a word, Sunderland," said Dillon quietly. He must risk everything if he were to forestall a second visitation and search. "Whatever this affair means, I have nothing to hide. You don't need any search warrant to satisfy yourself in regard to me. You have my full permission to search this room for jades or anything else. All my brother's personal effects were shipped home with the body—"

Sunderland shook his head. "This concerns a prominent murder case in Japan; murder and theft. We had a tip on one Robert Dillon, and came to investigate it; the warrants were merely to back us up if the tip was good. You're an entirely different person. We have nothing on you. Obviously, you're out of it. I have to apologize to you and thank you for taking the matter as you've done."

Dillon shook hands cordially. "You might do me one favor. Who gave the tip?"

"I don't know. Probably some confidential communication to the office," said Sunderland very frankly. "If I can find out for you, I'll give you a ring."

Sunderland and his companion departed.

The hotel manager regarded Dillon shrewdly. "Looks as though your brother had enemies, Mr. Dillon. Well, I'm glad to have been of service. It was a pleasure, believe me."

Left alone, Riley Dillon drew a deep breath, found himself unable to think clearly, and descended to the bar. He did a very rare thing, for him; he took a whisky and soda. And he needed it. Then he went into the dining room and settled down to luncheon.

"Who could have given the D. A. that tip?" he reflected. "It's pretty obvious. By this time, Hartly and Vincent know I'm not Robert Dillon, as the telegram proves. But Montague doesn't suspect the fact. He's paying me back for my little joke of last night. And begad, he certainly paid me back! Evidently, he's not in touch with Vincent as yet, or he'd know I'm not Robert Dillon. Well, let it pass."

At one forty-five he reëntered his room, glanced at the turquoise Buddha on the dresser, and dropped into a chair to await his visitor.

He was shaken out of his usual alert poise. Two things had occurred this morning to give him very emphatic jolts. First, that Bagley telegram, and second this visitation from undercover men.

Hartly and Vincent had simply looked up his hotel registration, wired Bagley in New York, and learned the truth about him. All this did not matter. The narrowly escaped search, arrest and consequent disaster did not matter either. It was himself that did matter enormously.

HIMSELF; he suddenly looked at himself now. He thought of his brother and those jades. Robert Dillon brought them here, ignorant of what they were; he had been certain of this from the start. That was the only

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way his brother would have touched them. They were the loot of blood and crime—and his deposit-box back at the Waldorf was filled with the loot of blood and crime.

"I haven't murdered," he thought. "Crime? No. I've been a gentleman; I've been true to my code. I've never broken my word, never betrayed myself or my honor. And yet—and yet—"

His fingers tumbled the ring of Cardinal Acquaviva out before him. There was his answer. Code? A specious code of ethics, a mockery, an illusion. For the glitter of a jewel that stirred his blood, for the confident and impudent thrill of pitting his wits against the world—what was he? Why, very simply, a thief. Nothing else.

A sharp, quick rap at his door. He started. The ring leaped out of sight. To his call the door opened, and Mr. Takashi stepped into the room. Instantly Riley Dillon's brain whipped back to the alert; he was himself again, master of the situation, knowing to the least detail what he would do, depending on his wits for what he would say—and yet subconsciously there was a difference. He had been flung off balance.

"Greetings! Greetings!" he exclaimed heartily. "Glad to see you, Takashi; faith, we'll clear the board in no time now. Sit down. There's the thing on the dresser. First, however, we have a couple of items to settle between us."

Takashi had already seen the turquoise Buddha sitting there. He stood staring at it, in his face a swift, keenly ecstatic light—the glorious look of a man who has faced hell and suddenly finds the pit withdrawn from under his feet.

Then, at Dillon's final words, Takashi turned, lifted his dark brows, and dropped into the chair indicated.

"I am at your service," he said in a low voice of intense restraint.

"Two things to settle," said Riley Dillon. "First, about those jades. By a queer train of circumstance, a box of jades came into my hands; I suspect what they are, but do not know. Can you describe the jades stolen from Count Yoritomo?"

Takashi, at this moment, was far from any subterfuge. He produced a cablegram and extended it. "Here is the message I received. Read for yourself."

The message was explicit. Takashi was empowered to give any one of the jades as a reward for the recovery of the others, and no questions asked. The twelve pieces of gem jade were described; the cablegram had cost money.

Dillon read it, then handed it back with a nod of decision. "These are the jades. Here, inspect them for yourself; I lost the box in retaining these, after I suspected what they were."

From his dresser drawer he took the jades, still in their cotton, and laid them on the desk.

Takashi drew the cotton layers away and uncovered the gleaming things. He glanced up.

"Yes. No doubt about them. I think you wish to keep one?"

"No; I wish one, however, to give as reward," equivocated Dillon. He picked up the one he had previously selected. "Will you be good enough to scribble a receipt? Then this matter is off the boards."

FROM the desk Takashi took a sheet of paper, and wrote a brief, sufficient receipt.

Dillon nodded and pocketed it.

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"The second matter?" asked Takashi, still with that air of repressed eagerness, of iron restraint.

Dillon looked him in the eyes. "I want to know what you meant by talking about the spiral of my hair."

A faint smile touched the lips of the other man. "If you like; but it might not be wise to provoke controversy."

"There'll be none," Dillon said crisply. He was conscious of unreasoning anger; with an effort he controlled himself. "Go ahead."

"Very well. As any scientist can tell you, the direction of the spiral at the back of the head is an indication of the handedness of any person. With right-handed people, the hair turns clockwise. With left-handed people, it turns counter-clockwise. With you, I observed that it turns clockwise—and yet I have known for a long time that Robert Dillon was a left-handed man. The conclusion is obvious."

Dillon stared hard at him, once more startled, flung off balance—for the third time this day. The first he could recall that such a thing had happened. "Meaning," he said slowly, "that—"

"That you," and Takashi gestured lightly, apologetically, "are not Mr. Robert Dillon at all."

"You're a devilish sharp fellow, eh?" Dillon again felt that singular thrill of anger. He had become aware of the deep restraint of this man; and restraint means power.

Again, with an effort, he controlled himself, shook his head, broke into his old whimsical smile.

"Well, that's off the boards also," he admitted, with a shrug. "I'm Dillon's brother; why I deceived you does not matter. You'll know soon enough, I fear. There's the Buddha. It's yours."

Takashi stared. "You mean—"

"It's yours. I got it back. The chap who slugged me last night broke the thing on the way home; I had an idea who he was. When he got there, I was waiting for him—"

"Broke it? *Broke it?*"

Takashi moved with the flashing swiftness of a striking snake. He was out of his chair, catching at the turquoise Buddha before the words left his lips.

The image fell into two pieces at his touch. He stood staring down at it, and a gray pallor came into his face.

Then he turned slowly. "Where is it?"

"What?"

"What was—was hidden in that hole."

"Faith, there was nothing!" Dillon exclaimed. "I took it out of that chap's coat pocket. There was nothing else in the pocket, upon my word. Why, man, that hole isn't big enough to hide anything!"

Takashi's face had become a gray, livid mask in which his black eyes burned with the fires of hell.

"It is big enough to hide a quill," he said in a low, thick voice. "And in a quill can be hidden a paper—"

SWEAT was starting on his brow, the muscle at his temple was pounding. Suddenly all his restraint, all his cold self-command, was ripped and rent asunder by a convulsion of blind passion.

"Where is it?" he cried in an agonized voice. "You have it; give it to me! It can do you no good; give it to me, I tell you!"

"Man, you're out of your senses!" exclaimed Dillon. "I haven't it. I care nothing about it. I got back the Buddha for you—"

"For yourself, you mean!" Taka-

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shi's voice rose shrilly, took on a screaming note of frenetic rage. "Liar, cheat, impostor!"

"Guard your words, you fool," snapped Dillon, white with anger, close to being swept away in turn. "I tell you—"

"Tell me nothing, you damned scoundrel!" burst out Takashi. "Look at it! You say the man broke it—look at it! You put glue on it. You tried to trick me again—oh, you insufferable liar, cheat, trickster—"

He was convulsed with sheer fury. He dashed the turquoise Buddha to the floor. A torrent of oaths burst from him; curses, foul invectives, half in English, half in Japanese. He was in the tide of a rage that nothing could stop or quell—until he clutched abruptly at space. His face turned gray. For an instant he seemed to hang in the air—and Dillon caught him as he collapsed.

Takashi clung to him. After a moment the black eyes opened; Takashi shoved Dillon away, took a step toward the door, and halted to collect himself.

"Listen to me, will you?" exclaimed Dillon impulsively. "It was Vincent who hired that cracksman to get the Buddha. Vincent, understand. You know him."

"Yes, and now I know you," said Takashi, his features twenty years older than they had been. "I want none of your smooth lies. Vincent, you say? I offered him a large sum for the Buddha; but he would not dare lie to me. You liar! May the gods crush you!"

The door slammed after him.

Dillon dropped into a chair. He looked at the turquoise fragments, picked them up, examined them closely. Yes, there was a trace of glue on them. How had it come there? Neither he nor Shark Harrison had glued the break. No wonder Takashi, having learned that he was not Robert Dillon, suspected him of anything and everything.

He looked at the fragments of cotton which had covered the jades. Takashi had pocketed these, disdaining the cotton.

"Devil and all—so it was a paper rolled inside a quill!" Dillon muttered. "And I handled him like a fool, lost my head. Riley, me lad, I'm ashamed of you; I am that! Now you've made an enemy. And if you'd used your head you might have made a friend of him. Oh, you blessed fool!"

WHAT had become of the quill which meant so much to Takashi?

It had not been in the coat pocket of Shark Harrison. Dillon had felt about for broken pieces and found none; the image had a straight, clean break. And the break had not occurred then at all, but some time previously. Ah! Apparently the image had been whole when Jane Hartly handed it over. Stuck with glue, then! Stuck just enough to get by. It had come apart in Harrison's pocket, and naturally the man supposed he had broken it.

A quill—and the quill was gone. Perhaps Samuel Drake had broken the image and had never noticed the quill. And now it was gone. Gone. What about Takashi?

The man's eyes haunted Dillon most disagreeably. He tried to crush the whole thing out of his mind, and could not. For an instant he had a vision of Takashi, Hartly, Vincent, Montague, all upon his trail with savage intent; then he laughed at the absurdity of it. His laugh was shaky.

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Hatred, enmity—why should such things worry him today? It had never been so in the past. Always, his gay disdain had mocked at any such malevolent hostility; he had been above all this. But now his debonair aloofness was departed, his self-assurance was shaken. The day had become gray for him, gray with threat. His fingers fumbled for the ring Cellini made, and laid it out before him on the desk; but he had no joy in the thing, for once.

"Blast it, what's come over me?" he murmured, and fell silent. Too well, he knew the answer. Before his mind's eye rose the face of Jane Hartly, eager and joyous, guiltless of pretense or falsity. With a savage exclamation, Dillon rose, strode out of the room, and for the second time sought the bar.

New York—best pack up and get back there, get out of this accursed town for good. It had brought him no luck. His nerves were shattered. Thief! Aye, that was it. No man could mock at the world forever. Get back to New York; run for it with his tail between his legs like a gutter cur!

DILLON finished his drink and sought the public stenographer. His merry smile was gone; he dropped into a chair and spoke abruptly.

"Write me out a sheet, miss. Leave a blank space at the top for a name. Now take this: The above is thirty years of age, well born, educated at the best schools in Ireland and England. Has traveled extensively. For the past five years has been an American citizen. Unmarried.

"At an early age he studied professional magic and became a skilled trickster. He discovered a passion for jewels which has ruled his life. He has studied them, he is probably one of the greatest l i v i n g experts in precious stones today. His monograph on pearls is a standard text book of jewelers, and his notes on the use of the dichroscope have become the foundation for the use of that instrument in the trade.

"With all this, he is a thief," went on Dillon, in a monotone, regardless of the startled glance of the stenographer. "He has not restrained his avid passion to own great and famous stones. He has acquired them in various ways, pretending to himself that the code of a gentleman has consistently ruled his conduct; none the less, he is a thief. He is unable to resist the lure of an extraordinary stone. Consequently, the man is a menace to society."

Dillon rose, promised to call for the paper later, returned to his room. In his own room he l o c k e d the door, lay down, and closed his eyes. Two hours later he awakened, refreshed and rested; himself again. He thought of that mad dictation, and when he had obtained the typed sheet and carbon from the stenographer, he read it over with an incredulous shiver. Had he really written this?

Yet, with an impulsive gesture, he folded it and thrust it into his pocket.

"Faith, it's been a hard day, me lad," he said, regarding himself in the glass as he began to shave. "A hard day, a dirty day, a damned bad day all around; now let's see if Jane Hartly can take away the curse of it tonight!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFESSION.

DILLON accepted a cocktail from the tray Ming Yen presented.

Jane Hartly, sipping her own, regarded him laughingly. "You gulp it down as though you detested it."

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"So I do. One must be polite, however."

"Hm! Seriously, that's one thing I like about you; no pretense," she said quickly. "I'll not make you drink another. By the way, did I thank you this morning for—well, for everything? Let me do so now. I'm honestly very grateful to you."

"Forget it. Did you burn those ledgers?"

A spark of amusement at the query glimmered in her eyes. She was very lovely, in a gown of deepest oxblood touched with gold. Her dark hair was piled in unruly masses; her piquant, eager expression quite fascinated Dillon.

"I expected you to ask that. Yes, they're safely burned, both of them." She eyed him for a moment, half frowning. "Riley Dillon, you seem different this evening. More subdued and—what shall I say, disturbed? This morning you struck me as a person whom nothing could disturb."

"Much can, and many things have," admitted Dillon. Then he smiled, and warmth grew again in his lean features. "You, most of all. That's not a mere flattering compliment. Later, perhaps, I'll tell you just what I mean."

"But, first, tell me how you got back those ledgers! I'm dying to know what took place, where you got them, and how. I'll never forget Alec's face when he saw you put them so casually on the table.

"That moment almost paid me back for everything. Come, tell me."

Riley Dillon shook his head.

"This isn't the time," he answered slowly. "Later on, yes. I don't want to talk shop; many things have happened today. For the first time, I've taken a good look at myself, and I don't like the man. Suppose we just forget everything that's happened."

"And get acquainted? Good!" she exclaimed. "Just one thing, first. I want to know what you meant by saying that we'd meet again to part again?"

"Why, just that. You don't know how the verse runs:

"'Dear brethren of the olden days, the golden days far-dying,
We'll meet again to part again, for you are none of mine!'"

She shook her head. "Never heard your verse. And I don't believe it anyhow. We're somewhat alike, you and I, Riley Dillon."

"God forbid!" he said, so that a glint of quick surprise and anger shone for an instant in her eyes. Then his whimsical smile banished it. "Come! Forget what's behind us."

"Agreed."

An hour later, when Ming Yen asked if he should serve the coffee in the dining room or in the library, and she questioned him with a glance, Riley Dillon shook his head.

"Here, if you don't mind," he said cheerfully. "I've a reason."

"Here, Ming. And your reason, Irishman?"

Riley Dillon laughed into her eyes, with his old breezy gayety. He was himself again, at least on the surface. Himself, and bewitched by the woman opposite him. Like to himself, he had uncovered in her a creature of swift impulse, of facile brilliance based upon sentimental depths. Yet she had a rarely practical view of things.

YES, Riley Dillon was a lost man, and knew it. At their first meeting they had been old friends. Now they were intimates. This girl had fired

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the deep romantic spark in him and the result terrified him, since he had today seen himself as he was. For him there could be no more than the gleaming, glittering affection of jeweled hearts; he had given his life to these cold stones; he must be content.

When he returned to the hotel this night, he told himself savagely, he would pack and with the dawn be off. There was an early morning eastbound plane. He could be in New York in twelve hours. He must do it.

"My reason?" he repeated thoughtfully. "This white linen tablecloth."

"A riddle or a parable?"

Dillon laughed, as Ming brought in the coffee. Then, when the old Chinaman had gone, he held out his closed fist above the tablecloth, waiting.

"Neither. We're not going to dance and have a wild fling this night, my dear. I'm going to tell you the honest truth for once, and then go my way. First, I've a present here for you; rather, you're to take your choice between two things. This gleaming linen is the most perfect background imaginable. Do you agree?"

"A present?" She made a mocking grimace. "Oh, sir! Could I accept a present from a strange man?"

"Devil a bit. But from me—"

"With all my heart!" and she broke into laughter.

Then her laughter died and into her face came a growing wonder, a startled amazement, as she saw what Dillon had laid on the white cloth before her. The hydra of gem jade, and the ring of Cardinal Acquaviva.

She stared from one to the other. She put out her strong, slender hand tentatively and touched the ring, then the jade. Her eyes lifted to the smiling gaze of Riley Dillon, and a little gasp broke from her.

"Oh, I've never seen such jade in my life—"

She stared at the bit of jade, drew it over closer. Again her gaze lifted, but this time there was a queer strangeness in her expression.

"Yes, I have, too," she said in a low voice. "This is one of Count Yoritomo's jades. I knew I'd recognize them again, anywhere. Am I right?"

Dillon inclined his head. "It was one of his pieces, yes. Now it is mine. It was given me today, for you."

Her eyes dilated. "Given you? But don't you see—it was a horrible thing! He was murdered, killed brutally, and the thief took those jades—"

"I recovered them. This one was my reward; for you. I don't care especially for jade myself, though I have one or two fine pieces. I knew you'd like this."

"Like it? I adore it, I love it!" she cried quickly. "Oh, you can't mean it, Riley Dillon—you can't just give it!"

"You forget the ring," he said.

She glanced down at it.

"Old-fashioned. Ugly; too much glitter about it. And who likes cameos, anyhow?"

RILEY DILLON broke into laughter. He could not help it. His sense of humor was fired and he yielded to it in uncontrollable mirth. She eyed him, half suspicious of his amusement, yet she could not help smiling in sympathy with this infectious laughter whose appeal was so irresistible.

"Do you know who made that ring?" Dillon broke off with the abrupt query. "A man named Cellini."

"Cellini? Himself? Well, I don't care. I prefer the jade to a dozen such rings."

"Good for you," said Dillon. He

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put out his hand, picked up the ring. It vanished. He plucked it out of the flower-bowl, turned over his hand; it was gone again. "A trick ring, you see. The jade is far preferable, I assure you. Shall I tell you how I got it?"

"The ring or the jade?"

He flung her a sharp glance. "The jade, of course. The whole dozen pieces. It was like this—"

He sketched the story for her. She listened, clutching the jade hydra, fascinated. Her eyes never left his face; they were searching, probing all the while he spoke.

"And the ring?" she said when he had finished. "Tell me how you got that, and when."

"When? A thousand years ago, I think; or was it yesterday? Hard to say. How did I get it? I stole it."

His somber air banished her quick smile. "You're not serious?"

"Certainly. You'd accept that jade even if there were blood on it, you said."

"Yes. I can't explain the feeling; but it captivates me, fills me with desire. I have a craving for it; a hypnotic craving, perhaps. A terrible confession, eh?"

Dillon nodded. "Yes. That's the way those four black pearls in your father's collection affect me. When I came to San Francisco, I meant to get them—as I got this ring. Yesterday it was in the park museum, part of a loan exhibit there."

She met his level gaze. The light died out of her face.

"Oh! Not you—you, Riley Dillon! Why, if you want those pearls, you can have them; in exchange for this jade—"

"Thanks, no. I don't want them. I don't think I want anything more," said Dillon in a weary voice. "You know, my dear, most Irishmen are three parts fool. I'm no exception. Let me prove it to you."

HE produced the folded paper that had been typed at his dictation, and with a pencil wrote his name at the top of the sheet. Then he passed it to her. As she read, he took out a cigar, which he trimmed and lit with meticulous care. His fingers were very steady.

His old gay smile flashed out, as her gaze lifted from the paper; a weight was gone from him.

"Why do you show me this alleged background, to give it a name?" she asked gravely, studying him. "Not because you're a fool, as you said."

"No, because I'm a wise man, to be frank about it," he replied whimsically, lightly. "One thing you like about me, you said; no pretense. Well, that's now true, my dear Lady Jane. No more pretense. You're a very honest person, and I'm not."

"You've just proved that you are."

"Not a bit of it. This is a unique occasion; I'm not going around passing out that statement to the newspapers, begad! I like you far too well for your own good, and I'm telling you the truth for that reason." He puffed at his cigar for a moment. "You see now, how I was able to get those ledgers. Having a command over locks and bolts, I simply walked into Hartly's hotel room and took what I wanted. Potiphar had him trailed last night. He was at the St. Francis, on the floor above me. It was very simple."

"Yes, simple," she repeated softly. "Why did you get this paper typed out?"

"Mad impulse. I was in a bit of a stew this morning." Dillon eyed his cigar for a moment. "In Hartly's bag

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I found a telegram from a detective agency in New York, rather a bad outfit. It concerned me. After our meeting yesterday he had obviously wired for information. Well, this reply gave me a jolt. There was nothing against me, of course, but it implied a few things. Crooked people could cook up something; and I'd not be able to stand too much investigation, I fear."

"Alec Hartly is a bad enemy," she murmured. Then she leaned forward earnestly. "Now tell me something important. To get these jewels you love, did you ever kill any one?"

"Heaven forbid!" Dillon broke into a hearty laugh at the question.

"Did you ever do anything dishonorable?"

"Of course not. Hold on! That is to say—"

"I knew you hadn't, you couldn't," and a smile leaped forth in her eyes. "So you're a thief, Riley Dillon? And you've just realized it today? Why, you adorable Irishman, I'd like to shake hands with you! Give me a match, quickly."

DILLON snapped his lighter open and handed it to her. He started slightly, then relaxed. She was holding the paper in the flame; it flared up; when it was nearly consumed and all but touching her fingers, she dropped it in her saucer.

"It's safer that way." Her eyes struck up at him suddenly, swiftly, sharply. "You're not a thief. You're far from a fool. You have intelligence. How does it happen that never until today did you look at yourself?"

"Illusion, my dear." Riley Dillon brought a match from his pocket and struck it. He held the burning match at arm's length, lifted his coat lapel with his left hand, and blew into it. The match went out, and he smiled as he met her intent gaze.

Like that; things are seldom what they seem. The more I studied jewels, the more I saw the most historic ones, the more beautiful and valuable ones also—for they're far from being the same thing—stuck away in musty places or in the hands of rich fools, gaudy women, degenerate rundowns of once great families. Nowhere appreciated as I could love and appreciate such things."

"That Cellini ring was on exhibition here—"

"An exception." Dillon waved his hand. "Even so, such a thing needs intimate loving contact to be properly understood," he went on musingly. "I have brought beautiful things together, borrowed them, for my own lifetime. Not to sell, mind you! I have money, I have taste, I have more appreciation for really extraordinary jewels than nine out of ten who own them. So, for myself, I gathered these things. Look at this ring; I can tell you stories about it, I can make an entire story, a true story, of how Cellini did every iota of work upon the gold and silver and cameo. I can make the thing sing to you—and who else could?

"Oh, I'll not deny there's a certain fascination in outwitting the world," he went on, with a shrug. "A game, a gamble if you like; but I never take chances. But today it was different. I suddenly found how the thing would look if I were caught with the goods. I'd be a thief; nothing more, nothing less. A thief. I've left written instructions about all the things I've gathered, which are not mine legitimately; in case of my death, they'd go to the legal owners. Until my death, I appreciate them. It's simple enough."

"And terrible enough," she mur-

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mured, "if you were caught with them. Yes."

"So I was shown today," and he nodded soberly. "Since my brother's death, I've been tangled up; these few past days have brought me into a net, a complex situation, and I don't know where it's going to end. I haven't told you the worst of it," and he shivered a little. "After I left you this morning and got back to the hotel—"

He told her what had happened, and of the two undercover men. She paled slightly.

"It came out all right, yes; but it jolted me," Dillon concluded. "Now, my dear, you can see just how I feel, now that I've met you, become acquainted with you—"

"And you'd better realize how I feel about it too," she said, breaking in upon him abruptly. "Riley Dillon, you're splendid! Thank you for telling me all this; I think it's an honor, and I adore having your confidence—and we're going to dance!" She flung back her chair and came to her feet, a glow in her eyes. "So you think that we're not going out to celebrate and have our fling, eh?

"But we are—oh, we are! And we're going to cut loose, Riley Dillon. We'll visit every place on the beach, and get home in the wee small hours, and wake up tomorrow different people with the world a very handsome place after all, now that we're friends. Wait for me in the other room. We'll go this minute, as soon as I get my things."

SHE brushed aside all that had been said with one superb gesture.

Riley Dillon was swept away by her eager verve, by the vivid impress of her personality; nor did he try to resist the rush of her enthusiasm. She was gone with a laughing word. Dillon strolled out into the reception room and on into the library. He switched the lights on here and glanced into one of the built-in jewel cabinets.

This, as it happened, displayed the rubies Samuel Drake had garnered across the years, some of them at the Burmese mines, others as chance brought them to his hand. They made a glittering, provocative display, certain of the larger ones being mounted in glorious old settings. Many of these stones were well known to Riley Dillon by reputation, for rubies had been Drake's particular obsession and he had spared no money on them. Here were rubies famous in the trade, shimmering red stones that had a history and were dipped in blood. Dillon felt his spine tingle at the sight of them.

Then he frowned, leaned forward, looked more closely. Something wrong here. Perhaps it was the lighting inside the cases. As he peered forward, Jane Hartly appeared with a gay summons.

"Look here," Dillon exclaimed, "I'd like to look at—"

"Silence!" she broke in with an imperious air. "Do you think I'm going to share my evening with a man whose sole passion in life is the pursuit of jewels? Not a bit of it. If you want to look at those things, Riley Dillon, you'll do it after we get home, not now. I forbid it absolutely! I'm a jealous woman. Come along! We're not going to mention precious stones again all evening. Is it a promise?"

"Upon my honor, madam," and, laughing, Dillon tendered her a solemn bow.

Five minutes later they were sweeping away in her roadster, out toward the beach and the gay night life fringing the Pacific waves.

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It was hours afterward when the roadster again rolled in at the side of the house and came to a halt. Jane Hartly reached over and switched off the lights.

"Ming won't be up. Let's wait here a minute; there's something I want to say. And—oh! I forgot all about it!" She turned quickly. "I was terribly chagrined when I discovered about that Buddha!"

"Discovered what?" queried Dillon.

"That it was broken. You see, Ming Yen only confessed to me today, upon learning that you'd taken it. Remember how queer I thought it was, to find it gone out of the library? Well, Ming hadn't taken it to clean at all, as he said. Today he admitted that he had knocked it off the shelf; he'd really taken it to mend. He was in a terrible state of mind about it. I hope it won't make any difference?"

"Oh, not a bit." Dillon could lie like a gentleman. "Did he mention whether he had found anything inside it?"

"Why, no. Was there anything?"

Dillon hesitated. He perceived suddenly why Shark Harrison, who had come for the Buddha as well as for the papers in the safe, had complained of not finding it.

"Something of no great consequence, I imagine," he replied. "I think we might ask Ming Yen about it, just the same. Was this what you wanted to say?"

"To keep you sitting out in the cold? No. Something else; it'd go better, sitting here in the dark," she returned. "Give me a cigarette, please."

DILLON complied, and lit one himself. Her serious tone disquieted him. During the past hours she had been riotous, a flame of dancing ecstasy, flinging herself wholeheartedly into a keen and absolute enjoyment of everything around her. A new woman had been revealed, the woman he had imagined must lie beneath her poised exterior, but whom he had not hoped to evoke so quickly. And now, past any doubt, he knew himself for a lost man.

Then she spoke, abruptly, mincing no words.

"I know what was in your mind this evening, and what's probably there now. You meant to make all that frightful, horrible confession and then skip out without seeing me again—a regular boy's trick. Well, I want to tell you something straight. In the first place, I'd far sooner have a devil than a fool for a friend; and you're far from being a devil. You're a man of honor, Riley Dillon; it shines out all over you. Now, that's one thing.

"The second thing is me. Do you know it's a long, long time since I've acted or felt like I have tonight? No lack of men, either—charming men, handsome men. But tonight I've enjoyed myself. We had a gay time without drinking; I never had a gayer. Now, I don't want you to suddenly disappear from San Francisco. Why? For selfish reasons entirely. I need you, because you make me forget everything around me. And in more practical ways too, perhaps. Am I right about your intentions?"

"You're right about what they were, yes. As to what they are now, God knows!" said Riley Dillon. "Faith, if I don't get away from here, I'm done for. Confound you, why do you have to be the woman I've imagined and dreamed? I don't want to fall in love. I want to get away from here and let you lead your own life. Why the devil can't you have drawbacks?"

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"You'd prefer me a halfwit?"

"Of course I would. Then I could say good-by to you with a light heart. Oh, you're a jewel of a woman, Jane!"

"From you, a master compliment. All right; promise me you'll not disappear between two days, go back to New York suddenly, without letting me know."

"I'm going back in the morning."

"You're not. Not for a week at least. Promise me!"

"Devil take it, do you know what you're asking?" he broke out. "I've warned you—"

"Bosh. I don't believe a word of it. You've met far more beautiful women in your time, scores of them; let it rest there. You're in no more danger of falling in love than I am. Now, give me that promise and we'll go in and look at the collection."

"All right, then. As you wish."

"Word of honor?"

"Yes."

She was out of the car and opening the side door before Dillon could join her. The lights came on. She shivered.

"Brr! It's a cold, chilly place, this house. I told Ming to lay a fire in the library; you go ahead and light it, will you?"

"Right, Lady Jane," assented Dillon blithely. "By the way, are those supposed to be real stones in the case of rubies?"

"Real rubies? I should hope so. They cost father enough. Why? Do you think they aren't real?"

"I decline to commit myself," and he waved his hand. "Wait till I get a good look at them. I'll go light the fire."

Odd, how chilly the house was, he reflected; it had been warm enough during dinner. He came to the door of the library and opened it. The room inside was pitch dark, the door had been half ajar. He reached for the light-switch, touched it, drew his hand back sharply. He stood unmoving for an instant. The room was very cold, was chill with damp fog from outside. A frightful premonition seized upon him. He knew already, as he touched the switch again and clicked on the lights.

He was right. All too horribly right.

When Jane Hartly came, a few moments later, Dillon stepped out of the library and closed the door behind him, and stood facing her.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, stopping short. "What's happened? You look—"

"We'll not light that fire," Dillon said. His gray eyes softened. "I'm sorry for what I must be telling you, my dear. You can't go in there. Ming Yen's in there."

For a minute she searched his face, her dark eyes widening with comprehension.

"You can't—you don't mean anything's happened—"

"Yes. He's dead, Lady Jane. I'll have to put in a call for the police. The window's smashed open. Ming Yen must have come in while the thief was at work."

"Oh! Ming—poor Ming!" The little low wail broke from her, and her face went white as death. "Why, I loved Ming Yen—I loved him, I tell you! He can't be dead—"

As Dillon reached for the phone, the sound of her sobbing was in his ears. He picked up the instrument; then, abruptly, he slammed it back on the rack, as an appalling realization burst upon him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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The lights were out for Varney

Applejack

By KEVIN JOHNSON

DON an' me, if you don't know, are a coupla ship's plumbers, an' we're on an overtime job down to the Ship Yard.

Along toward six o'clock in the mornin' we call it a night an' beat it for our boardin' house. It's a cold night, with a wind blowin' off the harbor an' acrost the open spaces of the Yard like somethin' straight from the North Pole. The old oil can that we use for a car is parked in the Yard, but she's froze solid when we get to her, so we leave her an' hot-foot through the Yard we go.

Turnin' into our street we're still runnin' to keep from freezin' to death. Up the street is Varney, the night cop, an' he's wearin' thick woolen mitts, an' his cloth cap is down over his ears, an' he's slappin' his arms acrost his chest an' poundin' those big shoes that cops wear on the brick sidewalk to keep from freezin'.

This Varney is the new night cop with Mullarkey on this water front beat. Mull has the five to one, an' Varney the one to nine night duty. Saturday nights Mull'd come into Nick the Greek's back room after Varney'd relieve him an' sing basso in our

Don and Cheese were only plumbers, but they certainly knew how to thaw out Officer Varney on a cold night

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quartette. Nick's is where Don an' me board. Let Mull get thawed out after comin' in outa the cold an' boom out Deep Down, Deep Dow-w-n an' it'd make you feel like prayin' for ev'ry poor guy that was ever lost at sea.

Varney is a young fellow and a what Mullarkey calls a prodigy of his, meanin' he's trainin' him in the way he oughta go, which means he's a friend o' Mull's, an' acourse any friend o' Mull's is a friend of Don and me.

We overhaul Varney while he's ringin' in his box. "A cold night, hah?" says Don.

"Cold?" says Varney. "Cold? Comin' by the Ship Yard I thought I'd perish, an' passin' the thermometer outside Glover's drug store it said twenty-five below zero." The clock on a church up the street struck six. "Six o'clock!" says Varney. "Three hours more till my relief comes. He'll prob'ly find me frozen stiff along the beat somewheres."

Acrost the street is Nick's, an' he keeps a restaurant on the street floor. They's a light showin' behind the window shades in Nick's place. "Nick is down stairs," says Don. "He'll be boilin' the coffee soon for that night shift from the rollin' mill. A great place, Nick's, to get a cup o' hot coffee on a cold mornin'."

"Thanks for the tip," says Varney. "Mullarkey told me about Nick's too. But Sergeant Greer's prowlin' around somewheres, an' before Greer ketches me leavin' my beat durin' patrol hours he'll see robins wearin' overshoes. I got a wife an' two young babies dependin' on me. Know Greer, do you?"

"Do I know him?" says Don. "One night last week Cheese here an' me spotted him hidin' behind a garbage can in the alley next to Nick's waitin' to jump out on the guy who had this night beat before you. But y'ain't got to let that louse bluff y'out of yer hot coffee, are yuh?"

The three of us all this time 're poundin' our feet an' slappin' our arms acrost our chests. By this time Don'd discovered that him an' Varney're brother Elks, however he does it, an' "Listen!" says Don. "Cheese an' me we're goin' to skin acrost to Nick's an' turn in—after we get our breakfast, I mean. Why don't you stroll acrost the street after us an' slip down Nick's side alley to the back door? Cheese an' me we'll have the back door open for yuh, an' then Nick'll pass yuh some swell hot coffee."

Varney takes a look up an' down the street. "On'y escaped lunatics an' sick call doctors an' night cops 're abroad at this hour on a night like this," says Don.

"And Greer," says Varney, an' he takes another look an' says all right. Then Don and me hot-foot it acrost the street and into Nick's place, which is a four-story boardin' house with a fruit stand an' a pool room an' a rest'rant on the street floor. Nick is there ahead of us an' he's measurin' out the coffee for breakfast. We let Varney in the back door when he gets there an' interduce him to Nick, who tells him in his bum English to stick around an' warm up while he's gettin' the coffee ready.

"How soon will it be ready?" asts Varney, an' Nick says mebbe fifteen minutes, mebbe twenty.

"Twenty minutes!" says Varney. "I dassen't stay here that long. Sergeant Greer'll be along—thanks, but I got to go."

"Wait a bit—it's a tough night out," says Don. "Here, Nick—ain't yuh got anything, Nick, to warm Mr. Varney up before he goes out an' freezes to death on a night like this?"

"Oh, sure!" says Nick, an' he goes an' comes back with a quart bottle o' somethin'.

Don looks at the Greek or whatever kind of a label it is an' he asts Nick what it says, an' Nick says somethin' in Greek that sounds like applejack in English.

"Applejack? Meanin' cider?" says Don, but by that time Nick is down the cellar shakin' down the furnace, an' Don gets out a water tumbler, fills it three-quarters full an' passes it to Varney.

Varney holds the tumbler up to the light, an' "I don't drink often, an' when I do I

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take a light one. What is this?" says Varney.

"Applejack, I thought he said—didn't you, Cheese?" says Don, an' I say yes I thought he did too.

"Though acourse he couldn't have, because who ever heard o' Greeks makin' cider? Some kind o' Greek wine Nick prob'ly meant," says Don.

"Wine? I dassen't—not on patrol duty," says Varney.

"On duty?" says Don. "Listen," says Don—"this ain't a question o' duty. It means lookin' after your health—maybe savin' your life for your wife an' your how many small babies? S'posin' you go back on your beat without somethin' warm inside of yuh an' yuh was to ketch pneumonia—then what? I think myself the police department ought to be hauled out on the carpet for makin' a cop patrol for seven hours at a stretch on a night like this. What do you say, Cheese?" an' I say the same.

Varney looks thoughtfully at his tumbler, "I d'know but you boys're right—the department ought to be."

"Sure they ought," says Don. "Throw it into yuh."

"No, maybe I better not," says Varney fin'lly. "It ain't Sergeant Greer alone, Don. I promised the wife I'd never take a drink o' liquor on patrol duty."

"Jeepers!" says Don. "He calls wine liquor!"

"Is it wine all right?" says Varney, sniffin' at it.

"For criminy's sake!" says Don, an' then kinda reasonin' with him like: "S'pose now you had to have a leg cut off. S'pose you're one o' these 'mergency cases that sometimes happen an' they's nobody handy to give yuh whatever it is they give guys to put 'em to sleep before they cut off their legs. Would yuh take a hooker or somethin' to brace yuh up, or would yuh?"

"But I ain't havin' any legs cut off, Don."

"Acourse not, but ain't it a 'mergency case with you now or ain't it? What else is it? You go out there without bein' warmed up an'—how many degrees did the thermom'ter say outside Glover's drug store?"

"Twenty-five. Why, do you doubt me?"

"Doubt you? A brother Elk? Not me," says Don, "but listen! Twenty-five below zero in this ocean burg ain't any measly little twenty-five below in the dry regions o' the great open spaces out in the wheat field country, is it, Cheese?" an' I agree it ain't. "Twenty-five below here," says Don, "with that cold damp wind blowin' in off the ocean, it's—well, it's twenty-five *below!*"

"You're right it is," says Varney, eyin' the little hot bubbles in his glass.

"You're damn right it is," says Don. "Why, on'y last week I was readin' in the Plumber's Review about a plumber bein' bitten by a snake—a rattlesnake. A drink o' whisky will save his life the doctor that's called in says, but will the guy that was bit take it? Not him. An' why not? You read it, didn't you, Cheese? Why not? Because he don't drink whisky, the guy says—it's a kind of a princerple with him. Now acourse it's a bad thing—liquor—if a guy don't know when to take it an' when to leave it, but d' y' know what? They ought to've taken that snake bite guy to the siki—siko—the whatever it is kind of a hospital they take guys to when they want watch 'em under a glass while they're goin' goofy. Now here you—you got a wife and how many small babies? Two? All right! Now s'pose you ketch pneumonia an' make widders 'n' orphants of 'em—then what? Acourse. Throw it into yuh!"

"But ain't you drinkin' with me, Don? An' you, Cheese?" says Varney, bringing the glass up to his face more.

"Cheese an' me," says Don," we'd have one with yuh, on'y we don't drink before breakfast. It's a princerple," says Don.

Varney eyes the water tumbler. "It's a whale of a sized drink, brother."

"An' it's a whale of a cold night," says Don. "An' don't look cross-eyed at it again—throw it down!"

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Which Varney does, an' when he does he stands there for about a minute, shimmyin' kind of, the same time shakin' his head, shuttin' his eyes tight an' makin' faces. "Wow! Powerful, ain't it?" he says fin'lly.

"Powerful is the word, brother," says Don.

"I c'n feel it right on down to my toes. Thanks, an' now I'll be hurryin' along."

"Wait a bit," says Don. He draws back an edge of the window shade an' there's Sergeant Greer poundin' his feet an' slappin' his arms acrost his chest out in the alley. "Serves him right—the snooper!" says Don.

"He must've seen me come in!" groans Varney. "An' when I come out, he'll haul me before the captain and I'll be disciplined or prob'ly discharged from the force. I'm done, all right!"

"Done nothin'," says Dan. "Slip upstairs to the roof—it's a solid block o' tenements from the alley here to the lane. Cross over the roofs to the last house in the block an' down through that house to the lane an' safe away."

"But won't he see me?" asts Varney, perkin' up kind of.

"Who—Greer? He will if he don't go blind," says Don.

"And what'll I tell him?"

"Tell him? Tell him you're after a burglar—'less you can think up somethin' that sounds better."

"But will he b'lieve me?"

"Acourse he won't b'lieve yuh. It's the pride o' guys like him they don't b'lieve anybody. Wait—what's that?"

"It's a row o' knockin's on the back door, an' a voice sayin': "Open up! Come on, open up!" It's Greer's voice.

"What'll I do, what'll I do now?" groans Varney.

"Do what I told yuh," whispers Don—"take to the roof."

"What's the matter in there?" comes Greer's voice between slaps of his chest an' poundings of his feet. "Open up and let me in!" says Greer's voice.

"Open up?" says Don. "An' who're you, demandin' to be let into a respectable private house?"

"You know who I am! I'm Sergeant Greer."

"Oh, Sergeant Greer! Oh, that's diff'rent, Sergeant," an' he fills the tumbler another three-quarters full, an' he shoves it into Varney's hands an' whispers: "It'll be colder'n hell acrost those roofs," an' without lookin' at it Varney throws it down his throat.

"Open up in the name o' the Law!"

"Better show him the way, Cheese," whispers Don to me, an' then aloud he hollers like to somebody upstairs: "Why the hell don't somebody open up the back door an' let the boarders get in a little sleep—all this poundin' and hollerin'!" an' while I lead Varney up the stairs, Don goes to the door to open it up for Greer.

I'm about to go back downstairs again, leavin' Varney to chase his burglar by himself, but by this time the second big hooker is beginning to work on him. "What a swell mornin', Cheese!" he says, takin' a gob of it into his lungs. His cheeks are pink an' flushed, an' he's smilin' all over. "Show me a burglar an' see what I'll do to him!" he says, reachin' around for his night stick, an' lookin' around him like it's a swell summer mornin', an' me so chilled I can just force my jaws open to say two words.

"Come along," I say, for I see it won't do to leave him alone. I lead the way over the roofs till we come to the last one in the block where they's a skylight leadin' down into it inside. He hates to leave the swell mornin', but I coax him down the ladder an' down the stairs, we steppin' on our toes so's not to waken anybody up. We're down to the street floor an' I'm openin' the front door to peek out an' see if it's all right for Varney to go out into the street, when they's a woman's voice shriekin': "Fire! Fire!" from upstairs.

"What's that — fire?" says Varney, wipin' off his forehead which is sweatin'. The woman upstairs shrieks: "Fire!" again, an' back up the stairs goes Varney. An' me, acourse I have to go after him.

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It's a blaze in the third floor kitchen, an' we throw some pans o' water on it from the kitchen sink, but that does no good. The flames go shootin' out into the hallway. "You, Cheese, you go down through the house," sings out Varney to me, " an' bang on all the doors to wake 'em up! Then ring in the fire box on the corner—I'll go after whoever's on the top floor!" It's a four-storied tenement.

I go on down bangin' the doors as I go an' screechin': " Fire! Fire!" an' by the time I make the street floor Varney is comin' downstairs with a baby on each arm an' shooin' a coupla wimmen down ahead of him.

It's mostly a Hunkie neighborhood an' the tenements in the block 're occupied by the families o' Hunkies 'n' Slovacks 'n' Checks who work in the Ship Yard on night shifts, an' now it's on'y wimmen an' children left to home. An' they's plenty children.

I'm back from ringin' in the fire box an' Varney is back from maybe his sixth trip o' rescuing babies 'n' wimmen an' children, an' he sits down on the first floor steps an' whispers: " They's something the matter with me, Cheese. I could go to sleep right here." His face is red as paint, an' the sweat is runnin' down from it. By this time the people from the tenements acrost the street 're running out with blankets an' grabbin' the wimmen an' children that Varney had rescued an' hustling 'em into their own places out of the cold. From away down comes the clangin' of the fire engines.

" I could go to sleep right here," whispers Varney, layin' his head on a step.

I take hold of him. " Come out into the fresh air—it's too hot in here," I says, an' I'm leadin' him out into the street when four or five wimmen come rushin' and yellin' at us. When we don't understand what they're tryin' to say, one of 'em starts up the stairs. Varney grabs her so she can't go up, and another woman comes runnin' up who c'n speak some English an' she explains that the grandmother of the other woman is a cripple an' she's still in bed upstairs.

" Upstairs in all that heat again!" says Varney, but upstairs he goes—a game guy—an' finds the woman. She's two flights up, an' she's a cripple all right an' she weighs all o' two hundred pounds, an' it's nothin' but flames pokin' their tongues out at him from burnin' rooms an' smoke is fillin' the hallway, but Varney, the husky guy, he picks her up, blankets 'n' all, an' starts for the street with her. I chase the woman's daughter down ahead o' me an' wait for Varney.

Down through the flame an' smoke he comes with his load. He makes the street hallway, lays the old woman down an' whispers into my ear: " They's somethin' goin' to happen to me—I think I'm goin' to die." With that he flops on the floor an' passes out. By this time they's a hook an' ladder truck outside, an' a chemical an' hose reel wagon rollin' into the street. The firemen come runnin' in, an' runnin' in with them is Don.

" This cop's a brother Elk—help me take him to Nick the Greek's," says Don. An' three firemen an' Don pick up Varney, an' carry him to Nick's an' lay him on the sofa in the back room. The three firemen hurry back to the fire, an' I tell Don what happened about the beginnin' o' the fire an' Varney rushin' up an' down stairs luggin' out wimmen an' children.

" He oughtn't 'a' gone in among all that heat with those coupla big hookers into him," says Don. " Heat an' booze they don't mix, but he'll come around all right."

Just then we hear a voice out in the rest'rant demandin' to know where is officer Varney. It's Sergeant Greer's voice, an' Varney that just now was dead to the world, he rises up an' whispers: " I'm cooked. He's got me dead to rights!"

Don shoves him back onto the sofa, whisperin': " Lie down an' play dead. I got yuh into trouble an' I got to get yuh out, no matter how painful it's goin' to be to my conscience."

We c'n hear the sergeant stepping our way. Don grabs the bottle of applejack from where he'd left it on the shelf, an' he pours some of it onto Varney's lips.

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"Criminy!" sputters Varney.

"Keep your mouth shut!" says Don. "An' your eyes. An' stay layin' down."

The door from the rest'rant slams back, the sergeant strides into the room, looks around, spies Varney on the sofa, bends over him, takes a coupla sniff an': "Hah—I thought so!" he says. "I could smell the liquor off him comin' through the door."

"Why wouldn't yuh smell liquor off him?" says Don. "An' me forcin' it down his throat to bring him back to life?"

"And was it before or after the fire you began forcin' him?" says Greer. "Look here, why did Varney take to the roof if it wasn't to duck me?

"I heard the word 'burglar' passing while you people kept me freezin' outside the back door."

"You cert'nly got good ears to hear—"

"My ears are okay an' I heard it, an' don't try to slip me that old gag about Varney seeing a burglar up there. Back in the days the city had night watchmen an' they went through streets with lanterns, singin' out, 'Two o'clock and all's well,'—back in them days they used that gag about bein' after a burglar when their superior officer caught them off their beats."

"That so? It'll be a smart guy," says Don, "who'll get ahead of you, won't it?"

"Lay off that kiddin' chatter. It'll take a wiser guy than you to kid me, an' d' y' know what I'm beginnin' to think?" says Greer.

"I can't imagine. Can you, Cheese?" says Don.

"Never mind Cheese. Varney was on the roof before that fire started—there was no fire when I came along here—an' I'm beginnin' to think Varney started that fire for an alibi."

"Well, well!" says Don.

"Never mind the well wells, and if it ain't that, how did Varney come on the roof by way of the back stairs here just before the fire broke out? Answer me that."

"Answer you that? Listen, brother—unless acourse you have to do all the talkin' to make out a case? Now listen and get things right. Cheese here an' me 're coming home from the Ship Yard, an' Varney is ringin' in his box on the corner. Cheese sniffs the air, and he looks up an' he thinks he sees a wisp o' smoke comin' out the top floor of one o' the houses down the street. The last house in the block it was—or was it the second last, Cheese?"

"The last house, Don."

"The last house? I guess it was. An' Cheese points the smoke out to Varney, an' Varney leaves us and goes down the block to inquire into the smoke, and Cheese an' me come in here, an' wait for Nick to make some hot coffee. Nick owns this place. He's a Greek but a good guy just the same. An' a wise guy too, till he gets to layin' his coin on those Greek wrestlers, but everybody ought to have a little patriotic bias, don't you think, Sergeant?"

"I know who owns this place an' never mind the patriotic chatter. Stick to Varney. What became of Varney?"

"Well, Cheese an' me we hear a knock on the back door. It's Varney, who can't get into the end house where the smoke is comin' from. He tried the front door, he says, but it's locked. Cheese here then speaks up and asts him why he don't try the front door of the house next to the last one. An' Varney straightens up an' he answers Cheese that maybe he's dumb, but he ain't so dumb as not to thought o' that. Ev'ry front door in the block is locked, says Varney, on account o' the late burglaries."

"Wait a minute, you!" Greer eyes Don, who eyes Varney on the sofa, who's showin' signs of comin' to, kind of. "What burglaries?" asts Greer. "Nobody around here ever told me of any burglaries."

"No? An' d' y' think the people around here tell you everything?"

"An' why wouldn't they tell me as well as the next party?"

"Why? Because they know you know ev'rythin' already an' it would be a waste o' time to tell you anythin' more."

"Oh, yeah!"

"Oh, yeah. An' lemme see—where was I,

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Cheese, before the Sergeant busted in? Oh, yeah! They's been three burglaries in this block in the last three nights, Sergeant. Durin' Mullarkey's first night watch they happened, an' Mullarkey asts everybody to keep their mouths shut about it till he c'n maybe get a clue. Cheese here an' Varney 're standin' at the back door talkin' how to get into the end house where the smoke is comin' from, till Cheese here gets an idea. 'Tell yuh what, officer,' says Cheese to Varney. 'Why don't yuh go up on to the roof o' this house of Nick's an' skin over the other roofs an' down into the end house where the smoke is?'

"Varney mulls over that," says Don to Greer. "'An' I s'pose I could do that,' says Varney, an' he steps in outa the cold to think it over. 'But s'pose somebody takes me for the burglar everybody is gunnin' for?'"

Don lays a finger on Greer's chest. "Prob'ly it was then," says Don, "you caught the word 'burglar' where you had your ear up against that wide crack in the door. I've told Nick half a dozen times he ought to putty up that crack. Anyway, Cheese shows Varney the way to the roof an'—"

"And of course Cheese has to go all the way with him," says the Sergeant, cold and sarcastic.

"You give me the pins 'n' needles," says Don. "S'posin' he does—what's wrong with that? You gimme the jigs—you an' your suspicions. Here, Cheese, you tell this bright Sergeant the rest of it," says Don. "Maybe he'll b'lieve you if he won't me."

"You see, Sergeant," I takes it up, "I'm curious to see how much fire there is under all that smoke, an' it turns out to be a sure enough fire. An' Varney risks his life over an' over draggin' people outa that fiery furnace till he's overcome by the heat an' smoke. He must 'a' dragged out a couple dozen wimmen an' children."

"A coupla dozen?" sneers Greer. "Why don't you make it a coupla hundred?"

"Leave that to the newspaper guys," butts in Don, "after Cheese an' me get through tellin' 'em about it. Those birds don't have to be told about what sized families those Hunkies got."

"Yah—!" says Greer. "A couple tough birds, you two, an' maybe you think you got me licked, but I'm reportin' Varney just the same. And the Captain is a martinet for discipline. Know him, do you?"

"On'y what Mullarkey says," says Don. "An' he says the skipper ain't so hard-boiled. Mullarkey's been on this beat a good while now an' he says it's the coldest beat in the world, an' there had ought to be a steam-heated rest room in every block for night cops these cold winter—"

But Greer didn't wait; he goes splutterin' out the door, an' Varney sits up. "You an' Cheese, Don," says Varney, "got great imaginations."

"Plumbin'," says Don, "develops the imagination wonderfully. Y' ought to see me make out a itemized bill. An' now lie down. The reporters will be along any time."

"But I'm all right," says Varney, "an' I gotta get back to my beat."

"You don't have to get back anywheres," says Don. "Your system, remember, is still sufferin' from the shock an' exhaustion of your heroic efforts at the fire. You go walkin' around like nothin' much happened an' people 'll say: 'Huh, he couldn't done much—he ain't banged up.' Lie down."

So Varney stretches himself out on the sofa again, an' when bimeby the District Fire Chief comes in to report ev'rythin' is under control an' how's Patrolman Varney, Don tells him Varney is in a tough way an' oughta to be taken to a hospital right away an' compelled to rest up a coupla days.

"It's exhaustion," says the Chief, lookin' down at Varney who's keepin' his eyes shut tight. "I'll take him there in my car right now."

The reporters are on the job by then, and two of 'em takes photos of four firemen carrying Varney on a stretcher to the Chief's car. And two more come in and get the story of the fire from me and Don.

When it's all over, Don an' me we have a good breakfast an' a good sleep. An' on

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our way to our night trick at the Ship Yard we drop into the hospital to see how Varney is gettin' on.

He's gettin' on as well as could be expected considerin' his awful experience, the nurse told us. An' when we get there she props him up in bed, where he can look around at a pitcher of red roses.

"Any word from the sergeant?" asts Don.

"Nothin' from him," says Varney, "but my station captain phoned he's recommendin' me for the Department Gold Medal. Guess Greer couldn't 've reported me, hah?"

"He reported you all right, but your Skipper was a patrolman once himself, remember, and I hear he covered the Ship Yard beat in his early days."

"Yeah? Well, even if he did, I'm no delicate pansy blossom. Just what happened to me last night?"

"Now I know yuh don't drink much," says Don. "But even so, on so cold a night those two hookers o' good stuff oughtn't to no more than sent your back to your beat rejoicin'. But who'd ever guess you was goin' to run head first into a roarin' fire.

"That it? Then I sure got a lucky break. I could just as easy been a bum an' fired from the force."

"Just as easy," says Don, "but hero or bum, you're the same guy all the time, ain't yuh? An' they got to hand it to you for bein' there with the nerve when it was needed."

"Nerve or applejack—which?" grins Varney. "But d' y' know what my wife says?"

"She prob'ly said those pitchers in the papers don't do you justice."

"She said that, but she also said no more takin' a drink for me on duty. I'll have to take the pledge on it, she says."

"No matter if it's a cold night like last night?"

"No matter how cold, she says."

"Mm—" says Don, "maybe she's right at that—they mightn't be a swell fire handy next time for an alibi. Well, Cheese 'n' me got to get along to our job. So long, but be sure an' remember Cheese an' me to Sergeant Greer when you meet him."

THE END

Living Heads

IF two wires from a strong electric battery are put into the ears of a newly removed sheep's-head, the eyes will open and roll grotesquely, face muscles will move as though in pain, nostrils dilate, and even the jaws may champ.

A horse so galvanized soon after it is dead will struggle violently—so hard that one man may not be able to hold him. A frog or rabbit will jump. A human arm will wave around and the hand will gesticulate. Once a hanged murderer, quite dead, was the subject. Current from a 270-pair plate battery was led from the back of his neck to his diaphragm. "Full, nay, laborious breathing instantly commenced," reported the experimenter.

Later an arm was galvanized, but the most striking effect was made by running one electric rod to the super-orbital nerve in the forehead, the other to the heels. The experimenter ran the wire in his hand rapidly along the battery from the 220th to the 270th pair of plates—giving fifty electric shocks in two seconds. Said the report:

"Every muscle of his countenance was thrown into fearful action; rage, horror, despair and anguish, and ghastly smiles united their hideous expression in the murderer's face." —*Delos White.*

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"Alexander! Save me!" Lysander cried

Lysander of Chios

By F. V. W. MASON

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

LYSANDER, young king of the Greek isle of Chios, had but one aim in life—to exact revenge from Mazaeus, the Persian governor whose forces had ravaged Chios. Setting out with a small expedition, Lysander sacked Mazaeus' summer palace and carried off his daughter Ione. Lysander fell in love with his captive, and she returned his love, much to the disgust of Kyria, a Greek princess who had stowed away on Lysander's galley.

The young king of Chios joined forces with Alexander of Macedon, who was fighting the Persians, and helped Alexander win a battle. However, when Kyria, prompted by jealousy, accused Lysander of having abducted her, he was condemned to death.

He escaped with Ione, and they were picked up by the Persians.

Mazaeus would not permit his daughter to marry Lysander, but decreed they should live as slaves for a year. If Ione could stand that for a year, Mazaeus was willing for them to be married.

Ione stood it for ten months, then weakened. Lysander, again escaping, started to rejoin Alexander's forces, bearing important information regarding the Persians.

One of the great battles of ancient times was about to start—with Lysander facing death as a spy

This story began in the Argosy for June 15

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CHAPTER XXIX (*Continued*).

CAPTURE.

DAWN was tinting the mountain tops when out from a grove of birches suddenly burst a detachment of Alexander's rugged Thessalian cavalry. They rode like madmen, but when Lysander made no attempt to escape they raised lances and reined in to a trot.

"Who are you, fellow, and what're you doing here?" queried the leader, his shadowy features barely visible.

"I am called Lycon and am from the city of Colchis."

"Where've you been?"

"In Persia as a slave—I've just passed through the host of the Persians and I saw some—"

"The rascal's only a clumsy liar," cut in another officer. "No northerners have skins so dark. Obviously, he's a spy, so let's cut his throat and get on with our reconnaissance."

For a while Lysander's life hung by a hair but, eventually, his calm and unafraid bearing decided the Thessalian captain, and he ended by ordering the suspect taken into camp under guard. Despite all his protests it was not until noon that an adjutant led Lysander into the cavalry general's tent. Philippus, a one-eyed veteran of fifty, severely eyed the suspect, drumming all the time on a dispatch littered camp table.

"You say you are from Colchis, yet your skin is dark."

"It is dyed, my lord, as is my hair. It was necessary because I am not—"

"The damned rogue talks like an Ionian," interrupted an officer.

"A damned renegade," suggested another, "but more probably a spy."

"Please let me finish," Lysander cried when Philippus, turning, beckoned a trio of guards. "I'm not a Colchian—though I said so for certain reasons."

"What reasons?"

"Reasons I won't reveal now. But I've vital news for the king's ear alone."

"More likely a poisoned dagger," Philippus grunted. "Take the dog away, Leonidas, and crucify him. By all the gods, I'll make spying around this camp a damned unprofitable profession!"

"No! No! As you love the gods, General, listen to me! I've seen liquid fire used by the Babylonians!"

A derisive laugh went up.

"Fairy tales! Every private in this outfit knows that rumor's just so much hot air."

"What's all the joke? I heard you six tent rows away."

EVERYONE save Philippus sprang to attention, and even he bowed slightly. Lysander's jaws clicked shut and he smothered a groan. Yonder stood Xenias, his tall green crest brushing the tent's entrance.

"A matter of a stupid spy, O noble Xenias," Philippus explained, "pretending to have important intelligences for the king."

"Intelligences?" Piercing as lance points were the Corinthian's eyes.

Philippus uttered a barking laugh. "Oh, it's that old nonsense about liquid fire. No use even listening to the rascal, sir."

The Corinthian, however, eased his sword scabbard aside and seated himself on a chest used to transport the divisional records.

Speculatively, he eyed the prisoner while fingering his long blue chin.

"Not so fast, friend Philippus. There might be something in all this. I interviewed some prisoners last week; they, too, spoke of this miraculous fire."

Philippus smiled acidly.

"As you please, most noble Xenias, but who ever heard of liquid fire? It's all fish wool and cow's wings."

"Nevertheless, I want to hear about it. Come here, fellow, and tell me what you saw."

As was his habit when in a tight corner, Lysander drew a deep breath—and prayed that his voice would not betray him. The evil fates indeed must have conspired to thus deliver him so promptly into Xenias' hands. In curt, succinct phrases he de-

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scribed the miracle he had witnessed on the plain of Sochoi.

To the beginning of the account Prince Xenias listened carelessly, his long fingers toying with the unornamented tang of his sword, but later he leaned forward, and his fingers ceased their restless drumming.

"Come over to the light, you."

Philippus held up a restraining hand. "No need, sir, the fellow has already admitted that his hair and skin are dyed. I tell you he's only a spy with a pack of fancy lies."

"So his hair and skin are dyed." Xenias narrowed his steely eyes and ordered the prisoner to turn his profile.

"Your Excellency has seen him before?"

"It's barely possible. Seems to me there's something familiar about him. If you've a barber near by we'll have this man's beard off."

"I protest against this indignity! It's absolutely outrageous!" the Islander stormed. "Is this my reward for having risked my life to bring your king important news?"

"No," Xenias retorted, sweeping off his helmet to run a brawny forearm across his forehead. "If, without your beard, you don't resemble the fellow I spoke of, why then I'll personally take you to Alexander and his majesty will probably overpay you a dozen times. But," Xenias' thin mouth hardened, "if you look too much like that other I've mentioned, then we'll put you to the torture, my friend, and find out if a certain headsman didn't make a curious mistake beside the Granicus. Shave him!"

TO protest further would only be to endanger his already slim chances, so the Islander submitted, hoping against hope that Xenias might not recognize him.

That such a hope was vain, the suspect knew long before a Syrian barber had wiped his face clean of lather and had put away his glass razors.

"Um. It seems as if Lysander of Chios has more lives than a cat." Grimly Xenias replaced his helmet and got up from the chest. "Will you grant me a favor, Philippus?"

"Of course, sir. You want this hangdog fellow?"

"Yes. As I said, I'm going to find out a few things. Hot irons and a few turns of the windlasses, I think, will teach him more respect for the truth."

Naked to the waist, his hands tightly bound behind him and utterly discouraged at last, Lysander silently endured a four mile tramp over the hot and dusty plain—the Thessalian camp, for the easier watering of their horses, was set apart from the main Macedonian encampment.

As he stumbled along a bitter smile curved his lips. How fitting that he should return to Alexander's camp much as he had left it!

Less than a mile from the main encampment, his escort, impatient to return to their midday meal, spurred their horses and began urging their prisoner along at a run. Lysander was ready to fall when all at once a handful of horsemen rode out of some near-by woods. Whooping and shouting, they were galloping on the trail of a couple of hounds which were in pursuit of a gazelle.

"Ain't that just like a bunch of gilded officers? Look at 'em, Clotho, out for sport while we poor dogs ride our blasted legs off on duty. And it's all on account of you!" With this a burly Thessalian corporal spat resoundingly into Lysander's face.

The Islander, however, showed no resentment, his gaze being fixed on the line of riders. They should, unless the quarry doubled back, cross the road some fifty yards ahead. Fascinated, he watched the gazelle flash by in long, springing bounds a scant twenty yards ahead of the greyhounds which, flat to the earth, were running like the wind. Hard after them raced an officer on a great white stallion and even in his extremity, Lysander appreciated the fellow's consummate horsemanship. Louder clattered the stallion's hoofs, then, all at once, Lysander saw red hair wildly flying.

At that instant the Islander gave one

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mighty backward surge which tore the rope end from his escorts' hands and, before they were aware of what had happened, he was dashing ahead in a frantic effort to intercept that red headed rider!

"Alexander! Alexander! Save me! I have news of vital importance."

Alexander merely cast the supplicant a glance, then thundered by.

"Silence, dog!" With his lance butt one of the Thessalians took time to knock Lysander flat in the dust before whipping up his long weapon in salute and crying, "Hail, Majesty! Reign a thousand years!"

NOW the rest of the hunt was pounding by, all handsome young men in the prime of life. Snarling fearful imprecations, one of the Thessalians had dismounted to pick up the rope's end and was lashing the helpless prisoner when a shadow darkened the sunlit ground. Instantly the guard jumped to attention and saluted.

"Who called my name just now?" Alexander demanded while with one hand soothing the white stallion.

"Only this wretched spy, your Majesty. We're taking him to execution."

"A spy, you say?"

"No spy—Lysander—Chios!" It cost the Islander a terrific effort to force words from his breathless lungs.

"Lysander of Chios!" Alexander spurred his mount closer and bent over the dusty prisoner. "By all the gods, so it is!" The blue eyes grew angry and also a little puzzled. "Why are you such a fool as to come back?"

"I have news for you, my lord. I've just come from the Persian camp."

"So have a thousand other spies! What's this you have to tell me?"

"Nothing that can be said in public."

Alexander cast an impatient glance after his now distant companions, then addressed the guards.

"Take this man to my tent and, on your lives, see that he doesn't get away."

Frowning, he cast Lysander one final glance, then wheeled and raced after the hunt, his short, lion skin cloak wildly a-flutter.

CHAPTER XXX.

BATTLE PLANS.

"SO the Persian king plans to circle around and come down through the Amanic passes north of us?"

"So I overheard Smerdis say," Lysander earnestly replied. "I think it's true, because last week I noticed road makers working among the foothills."

Alexander rumpled his mane of red-gold hair a while, then shot a quick glance across the table to Parmenio.

"For my part," that veteran declared, "I think all this is a clever lie. As you know, Lysander of Chios has no cause to love any of us."

"True, but still—"

"Besides, my lord, the Persians wouldn't have brains enough to think out such a maneuver. They'll do the natural thing and meet us in the passes or on the Syrian plains beyond." He shot a baleful glance at the dark skinned young man sitting so erect at the far end of the table. For the present Lysander was wearing a clean white himation edged with gold; it was characteristic of the always generous Macedonian king that he should himself have supplied the suspect with food and clothing.

"On the other hand," came Lysander's prompt protest, "I know that only picked troops, six hundred thousand of them, are being sent on this maneuver! The rest and the baggage will remain at Sochoi."

"A very pretty plan of Darius'," Alexander repeated as if to himself, "and a very dangerous one for us. Wonder who put him up to it, now that Memmon's dead. Um. If they came down through the Amanic pass they'd cut us off from the sea. And if the Persian thinks to leave a few thousand troops among the Syrian passes, we'll be caught between two millstones."

"But I tell you no Persian would ever think of such a scheme!" Parmenio uttered an exasperated grunt. "And remember,

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your Majesty, now is hardly the time to offend Xenias."

A frown drew parallel lines above the Macedonian king's strong red brows.

"I'll bargain with the Corinthian," said he, "and I think he'll listen, because he got his beloved princess back the other day. By the bye, when are they to be married?"

"Immediately after a battle is fought, my lord."

So Kyria was to be married! The news came as a surprisingly severe shock to Lysander.

"Call in the generals!" Alexander emphasized his command with the tang of a lavishly jeweled dagger.

"Yes, my lord." Parmenio arose and went out, his powerful bald head glinting in the light.

The instant he and the Islander were alone Alexander turned. "The gods alone know why, but I have believed in you, Lysander, even when your guilt seems proved. You—well, you and I are much alike. You understand because of this news about the Amanic passes I must alter my whole plan of campaign?"

"I understand that, my lord."

"Why I believe you, I can't say, but I think I must. If what you say is true, I'll double the honors awarded you at Granicus. But if you are wrong, either about the matter of the passes or the liquid fire," a sudden tigerish expression dominated the smooth and handsome features, "by Pluto, you will be a week in dying!"

THERE was something infinitely chilling in the king's manner, but mercurially he smiled again and, taking up a small ivory box, offered it to his guest.

"Try a spoonful, Lysander."

"Gladly, but what is it?"

"Something new—a spice from Ind my men captured in the baggage of an Indian Prince. Take some."

The Islander obediently scooped up a spoonful of coarse brown crystals and put them in his mouth. "Delicious! Why, it's sweeter than honey—and tastes much better."

Alexander dipped his forefinger into the little casket and swallowed a pinch.

"It *is* good—I shall try to get more of it—"

"But what is it, my lord?"

"They call it sugar—and it's rarer than flawless emeralds. Have some more—"

Almost greedily Alexander, though never a gourmet, ate a handful more, then saw Lysander looking at him. "Well?"

"Let me thank you for your clemency after the Granicus."

"Clemency?" Alexander looked up puzzled, and seemed about to ask a question when Parmenio returned with Nicanor, Perdiccas, Xenias and Philippus.

Loud and long raged the dispute as to the proposed changes in the plan of campaign. One party, headed by Xenias and Parmenio, were all for retaining the original scheme of attacking Persia through the Syrian passes. Alexander, himself, however, headed the other group, and pointed out the deadly risk of leaving Darius free to descend on their rear and so cut all communications with the sea.

"If I were Alexander," Parmenio cried, "I'd fall back on Tarsus at once."

"If I were Parmenio, I would," was the King's quiet retort.

Long and heatedly raged the dispute but, in the end, Alexander's will prevailed, as always, and after the campaign had been replanned, the council broke up.

It was only then that Alexander took Xenias aside, and for over an hour argued with and cajoled the thunder browed Corinthian. As a result Xenias at last nodded half-heartedly and, casting Lysander a murderous look, stamped out of the tent.

"ZEUS, that *was* a session!" Boyishly, Alexander laughed while dusting his hands as if to rid them of work stains. "Yes, he was in a very difficult mood, my friend of Chios. First because I'm believing you; and second, because he's heard that that little peregrine he loves has been captured.

"Peregrine?"

"The King of Naxos' warlike daughter."

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"Kyria captured?"

"So he said." Alexander looked full into the Islander's face. "Why, what's that to you?"

"But — but," Lysander stammered, "there are many Persians who could recognize her as one of the mercenaries who revolted before the Granicus."

"If they do they'll kill her," Alexander commented. "But why such concern over the woman who so nearly cost you your life?" When Lysander related the events following his escape from Mazaeus' troopers, the young king's blue eyes narrowed a little.

"Oh, so that's how the wind blows. You love her, eh?"

"Love her? Why—why no, of course not. It's just that I'm grateful, deeply grateful."

"That's as may be." Alexander clapped his hands. "And now we'll have some food and wine and some more sugar. Meanwhile you can tell me everything you noticed about Darius' army. Those Indian lancers, for instance, they're said to be the best in Asia. Who'd you say their commander is?"

"A Prince Royal called Artaxerxes."

"Artaxerxes. Um, isn't he the fellow who married old Mazaeus' daughter?"

"Yes, my lord."

And so the two young kings talked on and on, while horses whinnied and fought along the picket lines, and the long drawn hail of sentries going on post told of an army sinking into slumber.

"One last thing before I go, my lord, I—"

"You have a request?" Alexander pushed back his chair and with the back of a powerful hand wiped sugar from his lips. "Well, I'll see what I can do if it isn't too important. I'd like to give you back your corps of mercenaries, but that's impossible just now."

"All I want," the Islander said earnestly, "is command of a squadron of mounted slingers."

"Mounted slingers? I've never heard of such troops," yawned Alexander. "But what in Hades would you do with them if there were any?"

"Here's my idea—it may checkmate the Babylonians." In precise, short clipped sentences, the Islander then propounded a scheme, at once so simple and promising that Alexander forgot his drowsiness and listened with deep attention.

"By the gods," he chuckled, his head tilted a little to one side, "it can't be for nothing our names are so similar! Damned if your idea isn't worth a try—especially since there's nothing more risked than a squadron of light armed horse!"

"Then you think it's feasible to mount a slinger behind each horse archer?"

"I don't see why not—these Thessalian horses are strong and big boned. Yes, it's a good plan and these days I need all the ideas I can find."

"Then I have your permission to move about camp?"

"Yes. I'll give you a letter to Philippus and another to the Cretan commander. I'll order them to let you pick out just what men you want."

IN a tent with Alexander's own aides, Lysander spent the night but, for all his fatigue, sleep came reluctantly. Suppose that, at the last minute, Darius had changed his mind and was even now marching for the Syrian passes. Such a maneuver would bring him crashing down upon Alexander's rear.

And Kyria a prisoner! The more he thought of how he had left her in the heart of the Persian country, the more his conscience troubled him. Vain to argue that she was essentially self sufficient and that at that time Ione had filled his whole scheme of life.

When reveille trumpets sounded, the first thing Lysander did was to locate the Ionian mercenaries. There he was greeted by Cleomones, the Aetolian, who wrung his hand between both of his. Speedily the news of his return spread through the Theban and Aetolian camp, whereupon dozens of great, rough fellows came running up to squeeze Lysander's hand.

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"He's too tough to kill!" "I told you so!" "Lead us, Lysander, lead us again like you did at Granicus!" "We'll follow you anywhere, Lysander." "Where've you been?" "Death to that damned liar Xenias!"

Once the excitement had subsided somewhat, Lysander led his successor aside and inquired about Kyria.

"Aye, the wench turned up again about a week ago. But she's not the same girl she was at Zeleia and the Granicus. Nowadays she just sits around sharpening her arrows and staring at the ground. Even that damned Corinthian she's promised to has to be satisfied with a thin smile.

"Do you know what I think, friend Lysander? Somewhere out in Persia she must have eaten a slow poison."

"How did she happen to get captured?"

Cleomones shrugged. "She has herself to blame. She would go along on a reconnaissance yesterday even after I warned her not to go with those crazy Illyrian scouts. Well, she did and they all rode into an ambush. Precious few of 'em got away —they've some grand horses in the Indian division!"

"Indians!" A current of glacier water seemed to supplant blood in the Islander's veins. "Did you say she was captured by Indian troops?"

"So I heard. Last that was seen of the Princess Kyria, she was trying to get clear of her fallen horse."

Kyria a prisoner of Artaxerxes' troops! Lysander shuddered to think of what might happen if the Prince Royal chanced to mention his prisoners in the presence of his wife—a thing far from impossible in the Persian service.

All that day while battle brewed beside the deeply blue Gulf of Cyprus the Islander sought escape from his imagination by drilling the squadron of Thessalian horsemen and a company of Cretan slingers assigned to his command. But busy as he was, he was perfectly aware that somewhere in the background there always lingered a few Corinthians and a subaltern from Alexander's headquarters.

That night the Macedonian army camped just outside the little town of Issus; an ideal spot for a bivouac because the Grecian left flank pitched their tents on the sandy beach of the sea and, forming a friendly barrier, the river Pinarus lay perhaps a mile ahead, while off to the east a series of steep foothills effectively protected the encampment's right flank.

TOWARDS sundown came an alarming intelligence. Although no activity whatsoever had been observed in the vicinity of the Amanic passes towards which the Macedonian army now was facing, Persian troops were seen swarming in the Syrian Gate—so the southern pass was called. To make matters worse, a dysentery had broken out in the Macedonian camp and was spreading with epidemic speed.

That night there was a furious debate in the headquarters tent. Lysander, cleaning his equipment in the staff tent, could hear now the loud voice of old Parmenio, now the angry speech of Xenias and, more rarely, the slow, deliberate tones of the Macedonian king.

"While there is yet time I implore you to order an immediate movement to face the Syrian Gate," Parmenio was shouting. "For forty years I've fought the Persians —years before your Majesty could sit a horse. I know them!"

Xenias then broke in. "Why should your Majesty trust this Islander? For what reason should he love the man who confiscated his spoil, disgraced him before the army and who then condemned him to death?"

So the debate raged on in such violent terms that Lysander began to have shrewd suspicions concerning the loyalty of the Corinthian allies if a battle were joined in the morning.

Tortured by conjectures concerning Kyria, and suffering rending doubts about the accuracy of his own information, Lysander at last dropped into a restless slumber unaware, like the rest of the army, that picked Persian troops were taking ad

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vantage of a full moon to execute a maneuver so daring and subtle that it aimed a death blow at Alexander's little army.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATTLE STARTS.

LYSANDER of Chios was wakened from his sleep by a harsh sounding of trumpets, it was a wild, vicious noise like the screams of fighting eagles. One after another horns, bugles and the rolling thunder of kettle drums sent their frightened notes winging into the sky where dawn was yet but a promise.

"What's wrong?" "What's happened?"

"Quick! Arm yourselves. Quick!"

"The Persians! The Persians are coming!"

"Which way? How near are they?" "Shut up, you fool!" "Fall in! Fall in!" "Damn it! Out of my way!" "Give me my helmet!"

Everywhere was the clatter and confusion of armor being hastily buckled on and hoarse voices bawled a hundred questions. Then all at once the blare of the alarm trumpets died away, and such was the discipline of Alexander's men that immediately the calm voices of officers could be heard, directing the men to their accustomed places.

No one seemed to know what was afoot, though staff aides galloped back and forth, and panting couriers pushed their way through tangles of half formed and sleep sodden troops.

"Listen! Hear that?" "Well, I'm damned. I've never heard of those greasy barbarians moving at night!" "Silence! Silence there!"

Somewhere in the murky distance sounded the shivering clash of cymbals which always accompanied the movement of a Persian force, then louder and more ominous came the wild booming of kettle drums peculiar to the dreaded Parthian levies.

To Lysander's unspeakable dismay the noise was coming from *the direction of the Syrian passes* in the right rear! Utterly horror stricken, he heard the hostile uproar growing. It seemed that Parmenio, the veteran Persian fighter, had been right after all. Quite appalled, the Islander heard orders issued for a brigade of Illyrian cavalry to reconnoiter in that direction. Meanwhile thousands of peltasts were hurriedly striking tents, while others occupied themselves with adjusting their masters' armor.

"Nicely trapped, with a river back of us instead of ahead." "Why don't we move to face the Syrian Gate? They're sure to attack at dawn!"

Gradually the east brightened until steel glimmered faintly and thousands of sarissas, pikes and lances seemed to impale the fading stars. From the direction of the cavalry lines sounded curses, squeals and kicks. Then, at a headlong gallop, Alexander and his staff rode through the half formed army to disappear in the direction of the Syrian Gates.

Expecting arrest and summary execution at any moment, Lysander mechanically sought out his squadron of Thessalians and, to his infinite relief, found a company of Cretan slingers already on the scene. They were short, hairy fellows with enormously muscular arms and legs, but infantry and cavalry alike seemed sullen and suspicious of him.

"Why, before all the gods, don't we face about? In a few minutes it'll be too late!" growled the Cretan captain.

Upon the little Macedonian army a sudden abnormal silence descended, whereupon the derisive yells of still unseen Persians pouring down from the Syrian pass could be easily distinguished. It was indeed a moment to try men's souls.

ALL at once there arose in the Grecian array a quickly swelling murmur—a startled, uneasy undertone. Lysander watched helmeted heads swing from left to right by tens, hundreds and thousands. Quickly the diapason note was lost in a deafening shout of surprise which made the pinkish-gray sky resound.

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Lysander, like all those around him, was looking to the north when a thin segment of sun thrust itself above the rugged peaks of the Anti-Taurus and, like a Titanic spotlight, flooded the far bank of the Pinarus river with golden radiance.

"Zeus save us! A miracle!" gasped the Macedonians.

On a wide plain which, the night before, had been empty of life, the glory and might of Persia was drawn up in a vast, breathtaking host. From over half a million sword and spear points, the sun drew dazzling sparkles; indeed the Persian army glittered like a sun-lit sea because of its thousands of gilded helmets, gold trimmed bridles, shields and breastplates.

"So that was the strategy," Lysander muttered.

"What do you mean?" snapped the Cretan captain.

"The noise made in the Syrian pass while it was dark was only a feint intended to make us turn our backs to the real army."

"It failed—but to what purpose? Just look over there."

All about the Islander frightened voices were crying out.

"And we must fight a horde like that!" sighed a Thessalian trooper. "Why, we'll be drowned in that sea of men yonder!"

"You are free," Lysander reminded in a desperate attempt to reinstill morale, "and those men yonder are slaves!"

"Aye, but those elephants over there don't care about freedom! Ares! How big they are. See how they tower above the war chariots in front of them!"

To further depress the hungry, red-eyed Greeks, dense swarms of Asiatic cavalry began to maneuver off to the right. Lysander easily recognized the Indian division because of their turbans and their heavily gilded armor.

"Look! This is going to be no Granicus! Darius has his Greek renegades in the center—may Amyntas shiver forever in Hades!" *

* The ancient Greek concept of Hades or hell was a dim cold land of shadows.

And indeed such was the case; everyone could see the long spears of Darius' Greek mercenaries towering above the shorter lances of his Asiatic infantry and they were posted opposite the dread phalanx.

On the Persian army's extreme right flank squadron on squadron of Parthian horse archers commenced to advance up the beach—some of them were even riding out into the glassy waters of the Gulf of Cyprus and screeching like fighting stallions.

Compared to this awesome display of power, the Macedonian army seemed but a mere division by comparison, and Lysander could have sworn that a chill wind blew through the grimly silent Macedonian ranks.

At the head of his staff, Philippus came cantering by and saluted Lysander.

"You were right and I was wrong," he called and rode over with hand outheld. "Before it's too late, I'd like to ask your pardon and your friendship, if you care to grant it."

"With pleasure, sir. Before night we'll all need friends."

"Aye," gravely replied the cavalry general. "To bury us—"

EVEN while a makeshift breakfast was served to the men in ranks, the forward movement on the Persian left accelerated. One enormous division of cavalry after another disappeared into the wide, nearly dry bed of the Pinarus, and it seemed for a while as if the earth had swallowed them up, but presently their lance points could be distinguished rising on the near bank.

A bare headed aide on a lathered bay horse pounded up to Philippus.

"Orders, sir! Your troops, with the allied and Peloponnesian cavalry, are to pass to our left flank and report to Parmenio! Ride out into the water if necessary, but we must not be our-flanked!"

"Fall in the men!" Philippus immediately pulled on his helmet while barking an order to a trumpeter.

Cr-a-a! Cra-a-a! Short and sharp, the order to mount rang forth.

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"What are you going to do?" Philippus inquired as he turned away.

"I'm heading for yonder hilltop where I can watch the Persians till I see my goal."

The crisp November morning resounded to martial calls on bugles, trumpets and horns which set the entire Macedonian army in motion. On gaining the summit of the hillock, Lysander could see a screen of peltasts, archers and slingers running out ahead of Alexander's heavy armed infantry to engage corresponding Asiatic troops in a hot skirmish; in fact, the whole battlefield lay spread out at his feet.

As usual the Macedonian king was forming his army like the body and shoulders of a man. Cavalry divisions posted on his right and left flanks were like punching fists which could be swung to either direction, with the slower moving center like the torso and feeding strength to either flank.

While his men formed up behind him they grumbled and growled at being thus restrained from the action, but Lysander and the officers under him systematically studied the enemy's ranks for the particular quarry they sought. Taller and taller columns of dun colored dust now eddied over the nodding plumes of both armies. Six hundred thousand men were preparing to blot out this contemptible little force of thirty thousand which followed a stripling of twenty-three years!

"Look! Look! They're charging!"

A sudden terrific uproar marked a charge of Persian cavalry against Alexander's right. In firm ranks the gold and silver armor of the Companions glittered like a moonlit sea, and Alexander's enormous white plume was clearly to be seen as he led a counter charge. Squadron on squadron of Asiatic cavalry was wheeling into line to thunder down upon the Companions at a headlong gallop.

To the breathless Islander it seemed inevitable that the Greeks must be overwhelmed but, raising their war pæan, the flower of Alexander's army lowered lances and raced to meet the lighter horsemen of Asia. A moment later the crash of their collision drew loud echoes from a group of hills protecting Alexander's right.

It was hard not to keep his eyes on the cavalry battle, but Lysander forced his gaze back to the enemy's main body.

"Ha! There they are!" he cried suddenly.

"Where?"

"Yonder, behind that line of chariots! Mount up and follow me!"

THOUGH the sense of impending conflict was speeding his pulses, Lysander rode down the hill at a slow walk; it would give his slingers a chance to settle themselves behind the Thessalians on whose horses they were riding double. This proved a wise move since many of the big beasts kicked and bucked in protest at this unaccustomed weight over their kidneys.

The Persians who had charged first were executing the time honored ruse of pretended flight in an attempt to lure the Grecian cavalry after them.

"All set?" Anxiously Lysander cast a look over his shoulder and saw the Cretans at last clinging like monkeys to the sword belts of the cursing Thessalians.

Men were shouting on all sides.

"Now the phalanx is moving!" "They're driving the barbarians back across the river!" "No, they've been stoppped!"

In a detour around the rear of the entire army, Lysander galloped his odd force which numbered perhaps four hundred men. Dust was now like a choking miasma through which the din of battle beat in deafening proportions as Philippus' sturdy troopers rode full tilt along the beach to meet desperate opposition.

The row of foothills protecting Alexander's extreme right momentarily masked the battlefield, but when Lysander's little handful had circled around it they could see the phalanx thrusting desperately at the stubborn Greek mercenaries holding Darius' center. Before the Islander could see who was winning, some of the scythe bearing chariots went into action against the Foot Companions.

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It was a gallant attack, valiantly delivered and valiantly met. Above all other sounds rose the creak of axles and the clatter of iron tired wheels. The charioteers' long blue dustveils streamed far out behind when they leaned out of their cars to flog the frenzied animals.

To a man in ranks the chariots, most of them drawn by four powerful stallions, must have presented a terrifying sight, but the Foot Companions halted, arranged themselves in rows of eight men deep, lowered their fourteen foot pikes and braced the steel shod butts into the earth. In a twinkle a dense hedge of spears was presented to receive the onrushing chariots. These, with a sublime courage, veered not a foot aside but surged full tilt into the hedge of death.

"Great Zeus! Look at that!" Try as he would, Lysander could not tear his eyes from the scene as horses went down and chariot piled onto chariot. The Macedonian line gave, bent—bent and all but broke under the impact, while before their dripping sarissas mounds of kicking horses and struggling men grew miraculously. Like the stave of a drawn bow, the phalanx gave still more. Slowly it was being beaten back!

Right after the Bactrian war cars a horde of unarmored infantry was running forward with the obvious intention of pouring through such gaps as the chariots might break in the Macedonian line. It was a critical moment. In a few minutes the Great King would probably order forward the war elephants to clinch his victory.

LYSANDER'S hard riding detachment had just time to see the mounted Companions and other heavy armed cavalry start to the rescue, when they found themselves in the rear of the Indian lancer division. At first the dark riders uttered frightened shouts at finding enemies in their rear, but when their commander, probably Artaxerxes himself, realized he had but a scant squadron to deal with, he merely detached a couple of regiments and maintained his slow movement towards the blood running Pinarus.

"There they are!" Lysander yelled. "Go get 'em before they break the phalanx!"

Fierce joy mingled with anxiety beat in his brain for yonder, in a struggling column, the leather armored naptha throwers were starting down a little dry gully which, in wet weather, was but one of several similar tributaries to the Pinarus. Escorted by some Cardaces, easily two hundred urns, each borne by two men and equipped with hose and nozzle, were hurrying towards the grim struggle between the phalanx and the Greek mercenaries. In a few minutes these hideous engines would be spraying fiery death on the hard pressed Foot Companions.

With a whoop and a yell, Lysander's flying squadron bore down upon the Babylonians before they were well aware of their danger and had not their guards, inadequate in number, died bravely, they must have been wiped out in a few minutes. As it was they delayed Lysander's men just long enough to permit the Indian lancers to close in much of the distance they had to cover.

On a sharp command from Lysander, the Cretans leaped off their mounts and, dropping leaden bullets into the leather pouches of their slings, sent a deadly hail of missiles thudding into the thick of the surprised Babylonians. Meanwhile the Thessalian cavalrymen, disencumbered of their passengers, formed up behind Lysander in an attempt to stand off the Indian lancers long enough to assure a complete destruction of the Babylonians.

Loud in Lysander's ears sounded the crack of the slingers' pellets striking the earthenware naptha jars, and over his shoulder he glimpsed shattered urns spraying streams of naptha over the bare ground.

Completely demoralized by this sudden attack, the Babylonians tried to run, but their cumbersome armor and equipment made a retreat difficult. Many of them tripped and fell, thus smashing the jars. Nor could they defend themselves with

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their deadly fire because their torches had not yet been ignited. Some, however, were attempting to do so. Though the gully was dotted with broken naptha urns, less than half of them were *hors de combat.*

"Look out! Here come the Indians!" yelled a Thessalian lieutenant.

"Double line! Double line!" shouted the Islander, hitching his small cavalry shield well in front. "Trot! Close in! Close in! We've got to give the slingers more time. No retreating! *Gallop!*"

Screeching like mad, the two forces dashed at each other.

"Eleleu! Eleleu! Grant us the victory, O Zeus!" howled the Greeks just as the two forces met.

AFTER the first shock was over, Lysander hurled a javelin into the chest of a big, black bearded Sikh and, amid the furious crackle of splintering lances, swiftly shifted another dart from his left hand. Horses screamed, men yelled and riders blundered into him from all directions.

He was thrusting furiously with his second javelin when Deucalion, pierced by two or three lances, went down all of a heap. Immediately two or three Indian horses tripped on his struggling carcass and, since the same incident was being repeated in all directions, the action in that portion was suddenly converted into a struggle of infantry. Here the superior armor of the Greeks told the old story all over again. Though outnumbered two and three to one, the heavy Thessalian swords found no such obstacles as did the light scimitars of the Sikhs.

"Stand fast!" roared the Islander when the Thessalians seemed to give way. "Give the Cretans time! Stand, damn it!"

"Come on!" A deep voice was shouting amid the Indian array. "Kill those slingers —Come on! Charge! Charge! Those slingers are wrecking everything!"

After fighting his way by a succession of bearded faces, all screaming mouths and congested eyes, Lysander glimpsed the man who was encouraging the Indians—it was Mazaeus! From a high, two horse chariot he was launching arrow after arrow with deadly effect.

"Mazaeus!" Lysander yelled. "At last, you damned butcher!" Like a windmill of steel his sword hewed a way through the press and toward the chariot and its wildly plunging horses.

"Get in there, you damned women. Hit harder! Can't you fight at all?" At first the Satrap did not hear Lysander's deep voice, but presently he turned and, beholding the blood spattered Islander slashing towards the chariot, sent two arrows whistling at his assailant; one lodged in Lysander's shield, the other missed.

"Stand and fight, Mazaeus Kedmea! Remember Philo of Chios!"

The Satrap's charioteer lashed his team with the obvious intent of running down the berserk Greek, but Mazaeus roared an order to halt.

"So it's Lysander again! By Mithras, I'm glad of this chance!"

Flinging his bow onto the floor of the chariot, the Satrap drew his sword of Greek design and jumped down while the other combatants tacitly halted their conflict to watch. For this Lysander was desperately glad—each passing moment meant that fewer naptha throwers would escape.

"Now, dog of a Greek, we'll really settle matters," snarled the Satrap, who wore a stout shirt of chain armor and a pointed helmet with a nose piece.

BEFORE they had exchanged half a dozen cuts and parries, Lysander discovered that the Persian had the reach and, for all his age, the speed of him. In a little space free of corpses and fallen horses, the two circled and slashed savagely at each other while the onlookers roared encouragements. Since he was fighting for time as well as for life, Lysander gave ground, dodged and only seemed to parry Mazaeus' crashing sword cuts at the last instant.

"Stand, you island rat!" The Satrap pressed his offensive. "You talked big enough!"

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But still Lysander retreated. Once Mazaeus' sword hissed so close over his head that it shore away part of his crest. Damn! In a minute he must stand and fight—behind him a heap of fallen men and horses blocked further retreat.

"Why don't you fight? Are you tired, little man?" queried the Satrap when Lysander's point dropped lower and lower.

How white were his enemy's teeth seen amid that square black beard—gray-blue eyes glared into black and both fighters fell silent, but the whirring rasp and clang of their sword blades was unbroken. Lysander's foot, groping back, struck a yielding object so he stopped giving ground.

"Now, Mazaeus, we'll fight!" Gathering himself, the Islander suddenly met one of Mazaeus' downward strokes and thrust his shield high overhead. From under its scant shelter he thrust with the speed of a cat's strike, and though his point did not penetrate Mazaeus' stout chain mail, the impact none the less must have driven the wind from him for he staggered and fell back a few steps.

"This for Chios!"

Whirling up his sword, Lysander beat down the other's guard, and put the accumulated hate of years behind the blow. Under it Mazaeus' sword blade snapped and he was beaten down on one knee, with blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils. His pointed helmet fell off revealing the hair neatly braided about his skull.

"For Tyana and Sardis!" gasped the Islander and leaped in to make a finish. But before he could reach his enemy a squadron of Indian reënforcements came charging in to rescue the badly wounded Satrap of Syria.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TIDE TURNS.

THOUGH raging at his inability to make sure of Mazaeus, the Islander nevertheless remembered his responsibilities and studied the battlefield. What he saw was far from heartening; in fact the Macedonians were wavering on the brink of defeat in every direction save their right flank. Here, Alexander and his heavy cavalry were fighting hard after having driven off the cavalry which had been opposite them. Desperately the Macedonian king was trying to set in motion one of those turning movements for which he was to become famous, but in this case the maneuver was doomed to failure because Darius' war elephants were a living threat to his own right flank.

"Houk! Houk!" Lysander and his men heard the barking of the mahouts and saw them swinging their ankhs to goad forward the great armored beasts. There was something dreadfully final about those tons of flesh and sinew shuffling down to decide the battle; which indeed they would, since the Greek horses were terrified of these monsters. Up in the little castles atop the elephants, Indian archers were stringing their bows and placing darts ready to hand.

"Zeus save us!" gasped a Thessalian. "Alexander is lost!"

Either the impetuous Macedonian king had not noticed the impending menace, or else he was convinced that the whole battle depended upon immediately easing the pressure on his disorganized and half beaten phalanx; in any case he grimly continued his circling movement to the left rear of the Persian center.

In frantic helplessness, Lysander watched the tragedy take shape, and hoped against hope to glimpse Macedonian troops coming up to his rear. But no, he and the battered remnant of his Thessalians and Cretans were the only friendly troops in the vicinity.

"H'la-la! H'la-la!" Down in the gully the Cretans were raising a cry of triumph as they killed the last of the Babylonians. Glancing in their direction Lysander saw the gully running with a sinister stream of blood mingled with naptha. That gully! It chanced to run directly across the Persian position. Taxed by necessity, his mind worked like a well oiled machine and when he saw a torch flickering feebly in the hand of a fallen Babylonian, an idea struck the Islander with the suddenness of a fist.

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"Stand back, all of you!" he yelled as he caught up the firebrand and then, armor and all, covered some hundred yards to the naptha soaked depression faster than an ordinary man could run unencumbered. Scarlet faced, he flung his torch into a puddle of naptha and sprang back.

In a trice the whole course of the gully became a river of fire and at terrific speed spread downhill towards the disputed Pinarus. Some of the elephants were actually crossing the dry water course when billows of orange-red flame flared in their faces and seared their legs.

HAD a wall of stone been reared in their faces, the great brutes could not have stopped more abruptly; many of the men in their howdahs were flung to earth, or into the soaring flames. Trumpeting, squealing and backing in frantic fear, the huge animals curled up their scorched trunks and, despite the frantic goading of their mahouts, ran terrified in all directions and thus absolutely demoralized great masses of troops waiting in reserve.

"Eleleu! Eleleu!" Up from the banks of the Pinarus floated the deep throated shouts of the mounted Companions driving in to rescue their comrades of the phalanx.

Of the rest of the battle of Issus, Lysander retained only confused impressions because his men, being caught behind the Persian lines, became inextricably involved in the frantic retreat of thousands of Asiatics.

Detachments of cavalry from all nations began thundering by, often with two or three wild-eyed infantry clinging to mane and tail. Presently a particularly splendid group of riders in white and scarlet galloped past at some distance; riding in their midst was a tall, noble looking man clad from head to foot in golden armor.

"Hail! Reign a thousand years!" "Hail, radiant son of Mithras!" Even in the heat of battle, some of the fugitives paused to prostrate themselves, though Darius Codommanus, King of Kings, was fleeing for his life.

The fact that Alexander's unhampered circling movement had barely rescued the center in time, the Islander only later ascertained because, gathering the remnants of his squadron about him, he hurried for the Indian camp, intent upon a double mission.

Dreadful scenes such as had followed the battle of Granicus were being repeated, only on a much larger scale. Everywhere in Darius' abandoned camp reigned terrified confusion; horses, mules and camels ran loose, trampling terrified women and children. An Indian officer taken captive in the cavalry battle, now proved invaluable. It was he who, in broken Persian, pointed out an enormous green silk pavilion.

"What the Furies!" Lysander was amazed to see tendrils of smoke curling from an aperture at its top.

"Strange," panted a cavalryman at his side. "There can't be pillagers ahead of us!"

"Come on, don't let 'em burn the camp!" And he led his loot hungry foragers forward at a run.

How many eons had elapsed since he had burst into Mazaeus' tent? That of Artaxerxes, however, was even more luxurious, and the spoil scattered around it incredibly rich. But there was no sign of life or activity so he suspected a trap of some kind. Where were the usual terrified servants and shrieking women? Perceptibly the smell of smoke grew stronger.

"Close up! Close up!" he roared and drove his wild eyed men into a rough column. "A talent to the man who captures Artaxerxes or his wife—and two to whoever finds the Princess Kyria!"

Bursting through a tapestried antechamber and then a dining tent, the victorious Greeks at last plunged into the great central chamber of the pavilion.

"Gods above us!" As one, the invaders halted, dumfounded at the scene before them.

IN the center of the tent had been raised a huge mound of dining room furniture, beds, chests, straw and wood of any kind. Upon it had been hastily heaped

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Artaxerxes' treasure. But what first caught and held the eye were the nearly naked forms of several beautiful women. These were lying sprawled about on the lower levels of the vast pyre; concubines, if one were to judge by their scanty dress. Despite the drifting smoke and crackling flames, they lay very still; someone's dagger had pierced their hearts. Not so other concubines; tied hand and foot, they screamed ceaselessly and tried to flinch away from the eager flames. Above them certain Indian officers stood grimly looking down on the triumphant Greeks, and even jeered at them.

"Bring water! Pull the pyre apart!" panted the Thessalians, but the soaring fire formed an effective barrier.

Illuminated by the twisting sheets of flame, two elaborate chairs could be distinguished at the pyre's very summit. In one of them sagged the burly form of Mazaeus, his dark face turned the lead-gray hue of the dead; apparently there had not even been time to clean the great wound which Lysander had dealt him. The Satrap's head was protected by another jeweled helmet similar to the one he had worn into battle, but his corpse seemed to nod with an overwhelming weariness.

Silently, proudly, the Indian officers drove daggers into their hearts and sank shuddering among the heaped up treasure. The living concubines shrieked like mad until smoke strangled them into silence.

But it was when his gaze took in the other chair that the Islander's blood ran cold. Against its leg Artaxerxes was slumped, clutching a bloodied cloth to his abdomen and staring down through the glare with dull, tragic eyes which he presently lifted to the occupant of the second seat.

"Ione! Ione!" Hoarse as the croak of a raven, the name burst from Lysander's dusty lips for, up there, calm and serene beside her father, sat the golden haired girl whose life had become so intimately entwined with his. How many sweet and tragic moments had they not endured together?

Garbed in her most gorgeous robes and jewels, Ione had sat quite motionless until she heard his cry, but now she bent her head and there seemed to be a sad, half smile on her lips.

Lysander leaped forward only to be driven back by a blast of hellish heat. When he had dug the smoke from his eyes his followers were snatching what spoil they could and Artaxerxes had fallen dead or unconscious.

"Farewell, Lysander, Lord of my heart!" Faintly her voice penetrated the furious roaring of the fire. "I loved you well, Lysander, but not enough, it seems." She had to raise her voice over the hissing crackle which now was licking at the small feet Lysander had so often admired. "Farewell gift—you—ebony chest—guard tent. More precious—gold." Some main support of the pyre must have burned through just then, for the dimly outlined twin chairs disappeared into the heart of the vortex.

"Mazaeus is dead," Lysander muttered. "Philo will rest easier now—but Ione! little Ione!"

"Out, sir! Out!" Hands snatched at his arms. "The pavilion's falling!"

STUNNED and utterly appalled, Lysander was dragged out barely in time. A few Thessalians and Cretons lingering too long in search of booty were smothered, but the majority escaped and stood about, coughing and rubbing their eyes.

Only by an extreme effort did the Islander pull himself together and order his men to fall in. A flat faced Cretan, however, tugged at his elbow.

"The treasure, sir! Remember the ebony chest!"

"Take it," Lysander snapped. "It's all yours."

But his followers would have none of it, they insisted he go with them to a certain tent where the weapons of Artaxerxes' guard lay scattered about. Towards the rear of it lay a long ebony box in which valuable armor had undoubtedly been transported.

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"There's your loot, boys. Help yourselves!"

"Don't you want any, sir?"

"No—leave me alone!"

The Islander was turning aside when a startled yell recalled him to the present.

"This is the wrong chest, sir." "There's no treasure here!" "What the devil?" Cursing like fiends, a pair of Cretan slingers were roughly lifting from the chest a figure, carefully gagged and bound.

"Hades! 'Tis only a boy! Come on, fellows, let's get us some real plunder!"

It required less than an instant for the hairy rascals to scatter in all directions. Lysander, however, remained rooted to the spot and staring down on this figure which lay blinking and silent in the afternoon sunlight. It was Kyria, dishevelled and deathly pale, but still Kyria!

The uproar in the pillaged camp faded to nothingness as he swept the girl into his arms and with fumbling fingers began to cut her bonds. Next he detached a scrap of papyrus which a golden bodkin had secured to Kyria's chiton front.

"Eagle should mate with eagle," it read, "and a dove should stay in her cote. May the gods forever smile on the Lord of my Heart."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KYRIA'S ANSWER.

WAVELETS hissing gently up the beach afforded a soothing obbligato to more strident sounds in the victorious camp, and the pale, moon silvered stretch of sand at this point seemed incredibly tranquil after the long turmoil of that historic day. Along it two people strolled, revelling in the sense of peace and the faintly salt tang of a sea breeze.

"You intend to go with Alexander into Persia itself?" Kyria, dressed for the first time in the yellow edged white stola of a Greek Princess, raised searching eyes to the rugged features of Lysander.

Gently he shook his head. "Later, perhaps, when Chios is rebuilt."

"Ah, Chios—did Memnon and Mazaeus leave anything of it at all?"

"More than I was led to believe. Nearchus' fleet appeared when they were only half through their bloody work."

Kyria's hand sought his as she murmured "—And the Lady Hippolyta—?"

"Praise Zeus, she escaped with enough of my people to begin again."

"She will be glad to see you, Lysander. This year and a half must have been long ages."

"Long?"

"Only we women know how long a short time can be." Then timidly: "She must be very proud of you, too—Chios is free now and you had so little to begin with. An old galley and thirty men—"

"And you," he smiled. "I wonder whatever became of Conon?"

"I heard that he escaped after the Granicus and had taken ship for Carthage."

"He's too tough to kill—I suppose he's fighting somewhere. Funny, how right you were in your suspicions."

"Why are you wearing dress armor?" she presently queried.

"Later on I'm to attend the funeral rites of Xenias, Cleomones and other officers who fell."

"Xenias." A faint sigh escaped the tall girl's lips. "What a strange, dark sort of love he had for me. I think he liked me most because I wasn't afraid of him."

"Did you ever love—" Lysander hesitated.

"Never," she replied quietly. "I admired him at times, but my betrothal to him was all my father's doing."

LYSANDER picked up a handful of pebbles and one by one let them fall back onto the beach as he said: "He was very brave today. But for Xenias the phalanx would never have lasted long enough for Alexander to come."

A brief silence ensued, then Kyria murmured: "So you're Strategos of the Ionian Corps again?"

"Yes. Poor Cleomones fell early in the day."

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"I heard the ransom of that Indian Rajah you and your men captured will make you very rich."

"I suppose so," said he without interest.

"Why so indifferent?" the girl asked. "Haven't you everything worthwhile in the world?"

"Not everything, Kyria."

"Is it Ione?"

"No—she was lost to me long before she died on the pyre. Kyria—?" He stopped and, by the moonlight, she could see the pale scar made by the lip ring, the strong jaw and the level brows. His was no longer the face of the gay, gallant youth who had launched his crazy galley from Chios, but that of a grave and handsome man whose soul had been tempered in fierce fires.

"What is it, my lord?"

"Ever since I found you in Artaxerxes' tent I've wondered—"

"Wondered what?"

"Alexander looked very puzzled when I spoke of his releasing me when I was sentenced to death."

The girl's profile came into sharp silhouette as she turned to survey the moonlit sea.

"It's no wonder," said she simply, "since it was I who bribed the headsman to substitute another prisoner for you."

"What!" His eyes grew very wide. "And did you—did you send Ione to me?"

She nodded her small dark head.

"It seemed the least I could do after—after the court-martial." Her hand shot out in a quick, imploring gesture. "O, Lysander, you *must* believe I'd no idea your life was at stake! Xenias misled me. When I heard of your death sentence, I—I wanted to die."

"I believe you," said he slowly as his arms went out to gather her against the gleaming metal of his breastplate.

"And will you answer me one last question?"

"I—I'll try."

"How could I have been such a fool as not to realize long ago that no one but you could ever be queen over Chios?"

But Kyria could not answer because Lysander was clasping her closer still and her warm, bright lips were otherwise occupied.

THE END

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WHAT is your idea of the best story (of any length, from short story to serial) published in ARGOSY since January 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which, in the opinion of the editors, give the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others, the magazine will reward the letter-writers with twelve full, yearly subscriptions. We don't want mere praise; we are interested in finding out exactly what stories you like best. Nor do we care about your literary style or skill. If there is some story that you liked so much that it stands out in your memory above all others, that is the story we want you to tell us about. It isn't necessary for you to read every story published in ARGOSY. You will have just as good a chance to win one of those twelve subscriptions if you read six of the stories published as you would if you read them all. But we must know *why* you liked the story you choose as best.

Letters selected by the editors will be published from week to week, *but not all letters published will receive subscriptions.*

Make your comments as long or as short as you wish, for mere length will not be considered. Put down all your reasons, however. Then address your letter to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City, so that it will reach us not later than August 1st, 1935.

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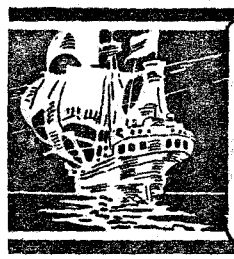

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ARGOSY may vary in price, but never in quality says

WILLIAM HART:

I've read ARGOSY for more years than I care to remember—that is, the years and not the magazine! I picked up my first copy in Hobart, Tasmania, aboard an American lumber schooner which had come in from the west coast, Seattle, I believe. That was back around 1913, as I recall it; and since then I've bought, borrowed, and stolen ARGOSY in many parts of the world. I've paid a shilling for it in Capetown, South Africa; the same amount in Melbourne, Australia; two *bolivars* (40 cents) in Maracaibo, Venezuela; four *scudos* (again 40 cents) in Fayal, Azores; twopence in Smithfield, London; an old shirt in Valletta, Malta; a bar of yellow soap in Port Louis, Mauritius. I even stole one in Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo, Egypt, when the magazine salesman ((an Arab) would not sell me one for less than five *piastres* (50 cents). Perhaps, then, you can see why I've never kicked about the hundreds of stories in various locations (although some of your authors seemed to be very hazy about their geography, particularly in the South Pacific, amongst the islands), which I've read in ARGOSY.

Well, may your cargo always be stored shipshape and Bristol fashion, and may your course ever point to success!

Hillburn, N. Y.

"MEN OF DARING" the high spot, says

J. C. COX:

In my opinion, the outstanding story printed in ARGOSY each week is—and will always be—"Men of Daring." Because: It has been my good (or bad?) luck to have traveled over fourteen different countries of the globe, under all kinds of conditions, and doing all kinds of work, from hard labor to flying. I served with Pershing in Mexico as an infantryman; with the 3rd Division A. E. F. in France, when I got the "L" knocked out of me. But I enjoyed all of it. Therefore, to those of us who have experienced some of the adventures as written and illustrated by Stookie Allen in his "Men of Daring," that feature seems entirely true to life. We are taken back twenty years or more, and those two pages of drawings mean thousands of pages of real life, and hundreds of true stories.

I have been a reader of ARGOSY for several years, and I expect to continue as long as my eyesight is good. But under no condition omit "Men of Daring." I enjoy the entire magazine thoroughly, from cover to cover, even the ads.

VOTES FOR 1935 ARGOSY COVERS

DO you want an original black and white drawing, an illustration like those which appear on the inside pages of the magazine? Save ten *consecutive* coupons like the one attached, fill them in with the date (or description) of the ARGOSY cover which you have liked best, and mail the coupons to The EDITOR, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City. The artist will present you with a drawing. You may divide your votes among several covers, in any way you choose, or even cast all ten votes for a single cover.—But the ten coupons must be *consecutive*.

COUPON

(*1 vote*—7-27-'35)

Date cover appeared.....

Or description, if you cannot remember the date.....

.....

.....

Your name.....

Address.....

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But as stated above, just those two pages of "Men of Daring" are *true* stories to us who know.

Charlotte, N. C.

FOUR or more:

ALVIN H. LYBECK

Allow me to be one of the first to congratulate you on the return of ARGOSY to *four* serials an issue. There will be many more letters congratulating you for the same thing. When I started to read the ARGOSY—'wa-a-ay back in 1925—there were four serials running. What kept me from dropping the magazine after a couple of issue, as I've done with many others? Those four serials prevented that. When the ARGOSY first had only two serials at the beginning of this year, only one thing prevented me from dropping it then and there—I had a subscription. If I hadn't been a subscriber then, it would have been good-by. I have a number of friends who take the ARGOSY. One of them wants the magazine to be all serials. The others would rather have four serials, and that's a fact. Two of these friends have quit the magazine recently because there have been so few serials. However, I suppose they'll start again now that it's four serials. Take a bit of advice from someone who has read most of the ARGOSYS since 1925 and plenty before (I've bought lot quantities of old ARGOSYS from various sources); *stick to four serials!*

Hollis, New York.

A ROSCOE fan,

LOU. J. BURCH:

Having spent twenty-five years of my life in the newspaper business, from printer to editor and publisher of daily and weekly newspapers, I have always been interested in foreign and Oriental diplomacy. That is why I consider Theodore Roscoe's "War Declared!" not only the best piece of fiction published in the ARGOSY since Jan., 1935, but the best I have ever read.

Roscoe is not only a great writer of fiction, but before long will be considered as a wonderful forecaster of what is sure to come in the near future. His leading characters are living men and women disguised under false names. Any reader of foreign news can pick them out. It is to Roscoe's credit that he does not create an impossible hero who accomplishes deeds beyond the power of even a super-human.

If there were less men like *Garganoff* and *Schnitzler* and more rulers like *Queen Roberta*, the world would be better off.

You have many fine writers, but do not let Roscoe escape!

Los Angeles, Calif.

ROSCOE'S "War Declared!" was the peer of them all, in the opinion of

ALBERT M. C. WALLACH:

Am too preoccupied to indulge in formal or serious comment, but after reading Theodore Roscoe's "War Declared!" I was so deeply moved that I am compelled to take time out to let him know, through you, that he has done a splendid job of it. It's grand! The portrayal of that Helvanian queen in action, her plan and her program, and the physical and mental reactions, the psychology behind it all, is simply—well, it's *superb!*

As an ex-military officer, a world-wide traveler, a writer and lecturer of sorts, and a student of national and international public affairs—and in view of the world situation today—I say that Mr. Roscoe's story was most timely.

I am writing to a magazine for the first time. A reader of ARGOSY since my early school days, I frankly admit that this recent effort of Mr. Roscoe's has completely erased the memory of other excellent stories that have appeared between your covers. It's the peer of them all—the finest bit of work ever to appear in your magazine!

New York City.

FOOD for thought from

WILLIAM CRESCENTA, Jr.

Being in my own small way editor of sorts of my college newspaper and magazine, I have been an interested and curious spectator of various collegiate anti-war demonstrations in this vicinity. In the interest of honest reporting, I tried to keep my personal views unbiased and impartial throughout. Quite naturally, therefore, I heard many logical theories as to causes of war, and many illogical theories. Some with practical explanations, some without. This left me in a very undecided state of mind as to what was what.

You may accept my word for it, that this indecision was immediately dispelled after reading the first installment of Theodore Roscoe's "War Declared!" Here were the answers to many of my questions, hitherto unanswered by any of my colleagues and a new and entirely as plausible a reason as any previously expressed.

I have never written you before and doubt whether I shall again, but I must commend you this once. You are to be congratulated as to your discrimination of material and Mr. Roscoe is to be congratulated on as brilliant a piece of writing as has appeared on your pages in years.

Not only are his characters true to life and recognizable as the men most able to plunge the

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world into war; not only has he upheld all the tenets of writing as to build-up, suspense, climax, etc., but it has that one factor that lifts it head and shoulders above the ordinary—the element of truth. It deals with a problem staring us in the face today and to which there is no solution unless all the facts are made known. Very ably, too, has Mr. Roscoe done this.

Hoping I may read many more issues of ARGOSY with the name Roscoe emblazoned on the cover.

P.S. If not asking too much would like Mr. Roscoe's autograph for my binding of "War Declared!" Please publish where he may be written to.

[Address Mr. Roscoe, care of the ARGOSY.]

Philadelphia, Pa.

A FAMILY affair:

MR. and MRS. WM. HENDERSON (and Children)

My family and I have been reading ARGOSY for the past three years and have almost let it take the place of our other reading matter.

We did not "just start reading" ARGOSY, but were asked to do so by a family friend. We took our first copy one evening when I was coming home from work. Stopping at her book stand, I was asked if I had tried ARGOSY. To which I replied I hadn't.

The first thing I knew I had bought a copy and was on my way home. After some few days our regular supply of magazines had given out—none was left but ARGOSY . . . I decided I would try it. I did. And now I won't buy anything but ARGOSY.

That is my story and the best I can do in trying to express my sincere thankfulness that ARGOSY was ever founded. And now we are—if I may add—boosting the good ship ARGOSY to every port in our neighborhood.

Birmingham, Ala.

"GIVE me ARGOSY or—"

THOMAS CLARKE SMITH

I'm a waiter in a small Southern café and though we are quite busy at times, when a lull happens along I reach for my ARGOSY. Several of our customers, following my example, have become ardent ARGOSY fans. In fact, in the evenings the restaurant looks more like an ARGOSY library than a café open for business.

I've found, after many discreet questions, that Fred MacIsaac, Erle Stanley Gardner, Theodore Roscoe, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and J. Allan Dunn are the most popular authors of the members of our ARGOSY Association.

Zorro, Tarzan, Bob Zane, and *Jimmie Cordie* are your most lovable and likable characters. ARGOSY and I are inseparable. Give me ARGOSY, or give me death!

Memphis, Tenn.

LOOKING AHEAD!

THE BAIT AND THE TRAP

Another great story about the red-headed Tizzo—The Firebrand. Now willing to serve the Borgias (the infamous Cesare), Tizzo finds himself being used as a cat's-paw. A long novelette by George Challis.

"LANCERS, ADVANCE!"

Did you read the book called "Lives of a Bengal Lancer"? Did you see the picture by the same name?—One of Argosy's favorite authors has written especially for this magazine a great two-part story about this most colorful military organization in the world, the Lancers. Begin this novel by F. V. W. Mason.

"FRONT AND CENTER!"

If you have ever been to a C. M. T. C. camp—if you want to go to one—if you are in one this year—you will want to read this story of the activities and the life that go to make up the C. M. T. C. camp. A novelette by Capt. R. E. Dupuy.

COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—AUGUST 3rd

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